

A HOMILETICAL RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGES FOR THE
AUTHORITY OF PREACHING IN OUR POSTMODERN WORLD

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To Leticia, my daughter.

May you find in my life the message I preach.

“We are the Bibles the world is reading; we are the creeds the world is needing; we are the
sermons the world is heeding” - Rev. Dr. Billy Graham

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to prove the importance of ethos in overcoming skepticism among postmodern listeners. When listeners feel the speaker has high character they lower their skepticism leading to effective persuasion in preaching. A test was performed to prove this hypothesis with two different groups. The test consisted of a sermon's manuscript evaluated by each participant. One group knew who was the preacher, and the other group did not know. After the observations and conclusions of the test, I highlighted three principles for preachers to take advantage of ethos in an audience of postmodern listeners: authority, character, and communication.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND SETTING

Introduction

Preaching is a very challenging activity in any time and season. Each era and culture brings challenges to biblical preaching that seeks to be faithful to the revelation of the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

One of the issues that makes biblical preaching difficult is not only the listeners' slowness in understanding their own times, but also the preacher's slowness. We preachers often close ourselves into our world of concepts. We want the listeners to understand us, but we do not read and comprehend them. In the beginning of the early church, for example, the apostles had to face conflicts with Judaizers. Many of the early Christians were Jews, and they brought many of their Jewish practices and observances to the Christian faith. They recognized in Jesus Christ the Messiah announced by the prophets and the fulfillment of the Old Testament, but since circumcision was mandatory in the Old Testament for participation in the Covenant with God, many believed that it was also necessary for participation in the New Covenant. So, they believed that it was necessary to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic precepts to become a true Christian. In other words, a person should become a Jew in order to become a Christian. The Judaizing heresy could be summarized by the following verse: "Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught

by Moses, you cannot be saved.’”¹ This is an example of a challenge for preaching in the first years of Christianity, a challenge for apostles who needed to be aware, careful and alert, directing the content of their preaching to respond to the challenges of their time.

Unfortunately, we see many preachers with expository sermons that have a very logical, exegetical, and biblical foundation but without a connection to the questions that people, Christians and non-Christians alike, are asking. Biblical preaching needs to respond faithfully from the Word of God to the questions that people are asking. As Johnston states, quoting Michael Hostetler, “Preaching today must prove the Bible’s relevancy, not presume it.”² We need to comprehend the main characteristics of our times for successful biblical exposition.

One of the chief characteristics of our day is postmodernism. That is the focus of this thesis-project. Some scholars such as Thomas C. Oden prefer the term “ultra-modernism,” or “late-modernity,” in Timothy Keller’s phrase. The terms vary but they deal with similar characteristics of our time. Theologian and ethicist Stanley Grenz states, “Whatever else it might be, as the name suggests, postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launched under the conditions of modernity.”³ Theologian J. I. Packer says, “Postmodernism is a negation of modernism.”⁴

¹ Acts 15:1. All references to Scripture are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

² Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 73.

³ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 2.

⁴ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 26.

Thus, it seems that the first step to comprehend postmodernity is to comprehend the primary elements of modernity. Thomas Oden maintains, “The modern age lasted exactly 200 years – from the Bastille in 1789 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.”⁵ Even though Johnston does not specify particular scholars, he claims that “other scholars” prefer an earlier date and cite Rene Descartes’ famous statement, *cogito ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”) in 1641, as the launch of modernity.

What is modernity? David Harvey feels that “modernity was the result of the Enlightenment ideals for improving the quality life through objective science, a universal morality, code of law, and social and economic organizations that would emancipate people from the oppressive forces of previous ages and usher them into a future of possibilities and happiness.”⁶ One of the strongest characteristics of modernity was: “true knowledge exists as a certainty with reason being the sole arbiter of determining truth.”⁷

Modernism called for the re-examination of human existence and way of living, from commerce to philosophy, with the goal of finding that which was “holding back” progress, and replacing it with new, progressive and better ways of reaching the same end. Modernists believed that by rejecting tradition as the primary dispenser of knowledge they could discover radically new ways of making art, science and philosophy and at the same time force the audience to take the trouble to question their own preconceptions.

⁵ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 24.

⁶ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford England: Blackwell, 1990), 12.

⁷ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 26.

The Christian author Graham Johnston affirms that the Enlightenment movement shaped the thinking of Western civilization. In *The Death of Truth*, McCallum characterizes modern thinking this way:

- a. Modernists believe it is possible to take a rational approach of life, and that this is the “enlightened” view. Superstition – the belief in the supernatural, spirits, gods – has no place in the rational approach.
- b. Modernists believe humanity is progressing toward a positive future based on technology and democracy.
- c. Enlightenment thinkers optimistically believed that their reasoning powers and their new approaches to scientific disciplines would lead to a world free from superstition, violence and poverty.⁸

Guiddens, a British sociologist, affirms that “postmodernity is a reaction against the arrogant claims and negative consequences of modernity.”⁹ Postmodernity is a discontinuation of the foundations of modernity, a drastic fissure from modern thought.¹⁰ Where modernity reveled in reason, science, and the human ability to overcome, postmodernity wallows in mysticism, relativism, and in the incapacity to know with any certainty either what is true or the answers to life’s great questions.

Postmodernity is a way of living adopted by a growing group of people in the most diverse areas of human life affected by their own time. Some distinctive characteristics emerge as the hallmarks of postmodern people.

⁸ Dennis McCallum, *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis, MI: Bethany House, 1996), 28-29.

⁹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990), 7.

¹⁰ Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 42.

First: rejection of objective truth. According to Grenz, the postmodern understanding of knowledge is built on two foundational assumptions: (1) postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true; and, (2) postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality.¹¹ Grenz continues: the postmodern person “rejects the Enlightenment question for universal, supracultural, timeless truth in favor of searching out truths as the expression of a specific community.”¹² In this sense, according to Stanley Grenz, postmodern construction of truth is both relative to the community in which a person participates, and since there are many human communities, there are many different truth; and an individual assumption of the reality, which leads to a particular and individual affirmation of truth. Grenz states that “the postmodern consciousness, therefore, entails a radical kind of relativism and pluralism.”¹³

Second: skepticism of authority. Since all truth is relative, postmodernity is wary of anyone who claims to possess the truth. Graham Johnston says, “Today postmodernity says: all you can believe is what is in your own heart. Count on intuition and faith, give up the idea of truth, have an experience instead.”¹⁴ Some of the French philosophers who pioneered the concepts of postmodernism – Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, for example – argued that truth is not an objective idea but a human construct, something created by humans. Truth is seen as a tool, often perpetuated by those in control as a means of

¹¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 43.

¹² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

¹³ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

¹⁴ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 9.

oppression and maintaining control of the people. The absolute and objective truth is seen, by many postmoderns, as a way to control and manipulate.¹⁵

Third: individualistic morality. According to Barna, “The most common decision-making was doing whatever feels right or comfortable in a situation. The alarmingly fast decline of moral foundations among our young people has culminated in a one-word worldview: ‘whatever.’”¹⁶ Since each individual has the right to construct his or her own moral code, one thing that could appear is to impose one’s own morality upon another individual. In the postmodern understanding of things, we cannot ground morality in some source outside of ourselves. According to Keller, these are some common speeches of people in postmodernism: “Keep your religious views private. What right do you have to tell anyone else what is right or wrong for them? You have to be yourself and not care what anyone else says.”¹⁷

What will biblical preaching sound like as the twenty-first century continues to unfold?¹⁸ For the biblical expositor, postmodern days raise unique problems for the task of communicating God’s Word. This thesis will discuss the importance of ethos in overcoming skepticism among postmodern listeners. Chapter four highlights three principles that can assist preachers in utilizing ethos to overcome skepticism among postmodernity’s listeners: authority, character and communication.

¹⁵ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 32.

¹⁶ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 184.

¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Viking, 2015), 132.

¹⁸ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 8.

The first principle addresses the preacher's authority. Since all truth is relative according to the vision of each person, postmodernity is skeptical about anyone who claims to possess the truth. The authority of preaching is grounded in the biblical truth about God, salvation, life and eternity. We can remember the words of Jesus: "I am the way, the truth and the life."¹⁹ Grenz states, "We simply cannot allow Christianity to be relegated to the status of one more faith among others."²⁰ We cannot relegate Christian faith to the status of one more faith because the Christian faith talks about the truth. We believe not only that the biblical narrative makes sense for us but is also good news for all. It embodies the truth – the truth of and for all humankind.²¹

This gap between the objective truth of the Bible and postmodern relativism creates a struggle for me and other preachers regarding the authority of preaching. This thesis-project addresses that struggle. My goal is to help all preachers communicate more convincingly the objective truth upon which biblical sermons are based.

The second principle is related to the character of the preacher. Professor Haddon Robinson wrote, "If we want credibility in preaching, we need character in the preacher."²² Throughout this thesis we will see the importance of character as ~~an~~ ^a most powerful element of persuasion.

¹⁹ John 14:6

²⁰ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 165.

²¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 165.

²² Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 261.

The third principle deals with communication. “Many listeners suspect that preachers live in another world.”²³ We need to communicate about more than the content of our sermons and biblical information. People who listen to our sermons every Sunday can politely hear it as a speech about a distant biblical past. However, we need a kind of communication that helps listeners to see themselves with their real problems and dilemmas in the biblical text.

Having laid out some of the leading characteristics of postmodernism, I next describe my particular ministry setting as a culture where postmodernism is prevalent.

Setting: Brazil’s Evangelical Context

The 2010 National Census of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE)²⁴ revealed that the evangelical population in Brazil rose from 15.4% in 2000 to 22.2% in 2010.²⁵ But there was a drastic growth of those who declared themselves to be evangelicals without a church. These people are “unchurched,” classified by the IBGE Census as evangelicals with no institutional commitment. This group increased between 2000 and 2010 by 779.2% (from 1,048,487 to 9,218,129). This data show that a growing number of evangelicals and seem to not want any church or religious leader to have formal authority over their lives. While many factors probably account for that sentiment, factors

²³ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 258.

²⁴ IBGE is the acronym for “Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística”, which translated is “Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics.” The National Census is taken every ten years, so 2010 is the most recent one at the time when I am writing this thesis.

²⁵ The IBGE performs a national census every ten years, and the questionnaires account for information such as age, household income, literacy, education, occupation, religion, and hygiene levels.

not under consideration in this thesis-project, one thing these nominal evangelicals possibly have in common is that they want to decide how they will lead their own spiritual lives. They are their own authority.²⁶

The skepticism of postmodernism makes biblical preaching difficult for many reasons. One reason which this thesis-project researches deals with the authority of the preacher. Simply stated, the preacher no longer has the same level of authority he or she had in the past. Homiletician Robinson made the following observation about the United States, but his words hold true for Brazil also:

A century ago, the pastor was looked to as the person of wisdom and integrity in the community. Authority lay in the office of pastor. The minister was the person, often the best-educated person in town and the one to whom people looked for help in interpreting the outside world. But today, the average citizen takes a different view of pastors and preachers. Perhaps we're not lumped with scam artists or manipulative fund raisers, but we face an Olympic challenge to earn respect, credibility, and authority.²⁷

If the postmodern culture has infiltrated the Brazilian church so that members now question the preacher's authority this can possibly change the way people see pastoral credibility. This is one of the problems that many preachers, including me, are facing in these days.

I am the senior pastor at the First Baptist Church of Penha, which is located in the largest city of Latin America, São Paulo, Brazil. The city is multi-cultural and dynamic and so is my church, and my church partakes of many of the qualities and issues of postmodernism described above. The Lord has given me the privilege of being the senior

²⁶ Rodrigo Cardoso. 2016. O Novo Retrato da Fé no Brasil. *Isto É*, accessed January 21, 2017, http://istoe.com.br/152980_O+NOVO+RETRATO+DA+FE+NO+BRASIL/

²⁷ Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today's Communicators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 213.

pastor in the church where I grew up. I started in ministry as Youth Pastor and leading the Small Groups Ministry. From that experience I became concerned about how our adolescents and young people were immersed in the postmodern concepts and values. The challenges were enormous and I wanted was to be able to preach the Word of God in a way that was accessible to them and had to do with the real problems each of them faced at home, school, college, and in their personal lives. Since 2015, I have been the senior pastor of this same church.

My congregation, in its majority, is composed of young adults and adults (18-45 years old). These people are highly educated and part of a dynamic city with postmodern values, and I see some of the problems listed above in our parishioners.

Having described some effects of postmodernism in Brazil and how those same effects are showing up in my ministry setting, I move now to the purpose of this thesis-project.

The Purpose of This Thesis-Project

This thesis-project deals with how preaching can address the problem of disregard for authority resulting from a postmodern culture. One of the challenges of this thesis is to help the postmodern listener to become more open to receive the message of the Bible.

My research question is: how can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative postmodern world that claims, “We are our own authority”? My thesis is that even in an anti-authoritative age, when listeners feel that the speaker has high character they lower their skepticism, thus leading to effective persuasion in preaching.

Thus, this thesis-project deals with ethos, a theory of rhetoric sometimes called “personal proof.” While logos is the proof related to the content of a speech, and pathos is the emotion and feeling part of the speech, ethos is the persuasive impact that comes from the perceived character of the speaker. Ethos is the listener’s opinion about the preacher as a person. Ethos is the audience’s perception of the speaker’s credibility, character, good reputation, and trustworthiness. This thesis-project proceeds from the assumption that who says something greatly influences the reception of what is said.

There are two dimensions of ethos according to Sunukjian.²⁸ The first dimension is competency. If a listener feels that the speaker is competent, intelligent, alert, accurate, and qualified, he will assign him high credibility and will be inclined to respond to his message. On the other hand, if a person concludes that the speaker or the pastor is muddleheaded, uninformed, lethargic, and inept, he or she will judge the speaker as incompetent and tend to discard his words and decisions. Sunukjian affirms that personal appearance, fluent delivery, organization, and awareness of real-life events is very important to convey a sense of competency.

The other dimension of ethos is character.²⁹ If a listener has a high view of the speaker’s character, seeing him or her as a person who is without guile and growing in godliness, the listener is more apt to be affected by the speaker’s words. If, however, the listener feels that the speaker is self-centered, manipulative, or deceitful, he or she will be less likely to accept the speaker’s message. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of ethos

²⁸ Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

²⁹ Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

when he states that “character [ethos] may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion.”³⁰

Although the theory of ethos takes in other aspects of “personal proof” such as expertise and warmth, this thesis-project examines the element of character. Robinson says that “perhaps no factor contributes more to legitimate authority and credibility than authentic Christian character.”³¹

The purpose of this thesis is not to give an exhaustive outline and explanation about the complex and extensive postmodernism philosophy, or even an exhaustive outline of persuasion or ethos. It is rather to identify one component of the postmodern influence in preaching, the skepticism toward the authority of preaching, introduce the impact of that skepticism on biblical preaching, and suggest how preachers can respond to this challenge.

Thesis Overview

The second chapter of my thesis is the theological framework. I write about the theology of the Scripture, theology of preaching, and theology of persuasion. Each of these is a fundamental part of the subject of this thesis. As I will argue, preaching is declaring the message of Scripture, but it is not simply repeating that message. There must be an interaction between Scripture and a present situation. Preaching seeks to do today, for the current congregation, what the passage did for the original listeners. It accepts that

³⁰ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle* (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1954), 25.

³¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 37.

Scripture not only says certain things but that it also does certain things, and preachers try to say and do those things.

In the third chapter, literature review, I will present some of the main thoughts and main authors who have written about the topic of postmodernity and preaching, giving special attention to any writings that deal with skepticism and ethos. The purpose of the literature review is to situate my own research in the existing body of research.

Chapter four is the heart of this thesis as I seek to verify my thesis statement. In the first part of the chapter, I will report interviews of listeners from Brazilian Baptist churches registered at the Brazilian Baptist Convention in the city of São Paulo. The purpose of the interviews is to evaluate the impact character has in preaching. I seek to find out if the well-known character of the preacher is related to persuasion. That is, when listeners know and respect the character of the preacher, does this lower their skepticism, making them more open to persuasion?

In the second part of chapter four, I articulate how preachers can take advantage of the character element of ethos so that their sermons may be considered trustworthy and motivate people's attention, stirring a desire to listen to them. To take advantage of ethos to overcome skepticism from postmodern listeners I will articulate three principles that will be explained in chapter four: authority – from Scripture –, character – defining our preaching – and, communication – for the understanding of postmodern listeners.

In the fifth chapter of this thesis, the outcomes, I draw conclusions about the findings of the thesis-project based on these four questions: What did I learn? How will these outcomes affect my ministry and preaching? Where will this take us? What else needs to be done about the topic?

CHAPTER TWO

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This thesis asks the question, “How can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative world?” Any answer we provide must be built on a solid foundation of biblical theology. This chapter will address the biblical and theological framework of Scripture, preaching and persuasion.

Theology of Scripture

Biblical preaching is grounded, of course, in the Bible, which I believe is the inspired and inerrant word of God. By inspiration of the Scripture we mean that supernatural influence of the Holy Spirit upon the Scripture writers that rendered their writings an accurate record of what God desired to reveal. The influence of the Spirit resulted in what they wrote actually being the Word of God.¹ By inerrancy of the Scripture we mean that the Bible is, according to theologian Norman Geisler, the “very Word of God without error in all they teach (including history and science) and is thereby infallible rule and final authority for the faith and practice of all believers.”²

Jonathan Edwards, a significant theologian in the Great Awakening of the eighteenth century, believed “ministers are not to preach those things which their own

¹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 199.

² Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2002), 498.

wisdom or reason suggest, but the things that are already dictated to them by the superior wisdom and knowledge of God.”³ Sidney Greidanus, pastor in the Christian Reformed Church and professor at Calvin College, The King’s College and Calvin Theological Seminary, concurs: “If contemporary preachers wish to preach the Word, they will need to proclaim relevantly the Word that was long ago inscribed in Scripture. To preach the word today means, therefore, to pass to the church here and now the message of the Bible. The call to preach the Word is a call to preach biblically.”⁴

I believe preaching is declaring the message of Scripture, but it is not simply repeating that message. There must be an interaction between the Scripture and a present situation. There is a need for a dialogue and a firm and precise bridge between the two worlds: the world of biblical authors and original listeners who have received the biblical message in their time and the world of the listeners of our twenty-first century world. Preaching seeks to do today, for the current congregation, what the passage did for the original listener and readers. It accepts that Scripture not only says certain things but that it also does certain things. Preaching seeks to discover what God, through Scripture, wants to do for, with, and through a particular congregation. In general, as preachers we must remember that the proclamation of the Word of God is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.”⁵ To preach is to carry a message that transforms and saves. Faithful and effective biblical preaching assumes the authority, clarity, necessity, and the sufficiency of the Scripture.

³ Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 412.

⁴ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 10.

⁵ Romans 1:16.

The first aspect in the theology of Scripture herein highlighted is the authority of Scripture. According to Grudem the authority of Scripture means, “All the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”⁶ That the Bible is the Word of God can also be determined from the fact that it has divine authority;⁷ Jesus said it was exalted above all human authority.⁸

Authority, the topic of this thesis, is a subject arousing considerable controversy in our society today. Bible preachers consider the Bible as the ultimate authority for their preaching. The Apostle Paul giving advice to the young preacher Timothy said, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage —with great patience and careful instruction”⁹ We have to preach the word of God. This is the foundation of our authority. By authority we mean the right to command belief and/or action. The term has a wide range of applications. When we turn to the specialized issue of religious authority, the crucial question is: Is there some person, institution, or document possessing the right to prescribe belief and action on religious matters? From the Christian point of view, God is the authority because of who he is. He is the authority because of what he has done. He has created us as well as everything that exists and in the Bible we can find the word of God.

All the words in Scripture are God’s words. This is what the Bible claims for itself: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for

⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 73.

⁷ Matthew 5:17-18.

⁸ Matthew 15:3-6.

⁹ 2 Timothy 4:2

correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”¹⁰ This leads us also to affirm the inerrancy of the Bible, the doctrinal belief that the Bible always tells the truth, and it always tells the truth concerning everything referenced in it. The understanding that the Bible is the word of God is foundational to a sermon. It is what gives a sermon or a preacher authority. The Protestant Reformation recovered the doctrine of the authority of the canonical Scriptures that had been buried during the Middle Ages. The reformers in general rejected papal authority and infallibility and re-established the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures. They understood that the infallibility of the Scriptures is derived from Scripture itself and has roots in the Old Testament prophets, in the Lord Jesus and his apostles.

I would like to advance a little in the discussion of the authority of Scripture. This work does not intend to enter into the discussion of theological liberalism and its relativization of the concept of authority of the Scripture. However, I would like to set forth some ideas since this thesis deals with the subject of the authority of preaching, which is linked with the authority of Scripture. What we saw in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was theological liberalism, a line of thought that has connections with the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation. This method denies divine inspiration and reduces the Scriptures to a compendium of Israelite faith and early Christians, filled with errors and contradictions. Influenced by the Enlightenment, liberalism acquired an anthropocentric character and relativized key issues of dogmatics.

The liberal theologian distinguishes between history, facts and holy history, or salvific history, creating two distinct and unconnected worlds: the world of real facts and

¹⁰ 2 Timothy 3:16-17 KJV

the world of faith, of the history of salvation. In the liberal theologian's view, themes such as creation, Adam, the Fall, miracles, and resurrection, among others, belong to saving history and not to real and gross history. For liberals it does not matter what actually happened at the tomb of Jesus on the first day of the week, but rather the statement of the disciples of Jesus proclaiming that Jesus was resurrected. Clearly what they want to assert with this approach is quite different from what the historical Christian faith believes. In fact, they consider that the biblical accounts of miracles are pious inventions of the Jewish people and early Christians, myths and legends from a pre-scientific age, when there was no rational and logical explanation for the supernatural. Preachers in postmodern days need to affirm the commitment to fidelity to the inspired, infallible, inerrant word of God, which transforms the lives of the people who are reached by it. Recalling the words of the Apostle Peter "If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God."¹¹

Charles Spurgeon, a nineteenth century preacher said this about the authority of the Scriptures:

There seems to me to have been twice as much done in some ages in defending the Bible as in expounding it, but if the whole of our strength shall henceforth go to the exposition and spreading of it, we may leave it pretty much to defend itself. I do not know whether you see that lion, it is very distinctly before my eyes; a number of persons advance to attack him, while a host of us would defend [him]. Pardon me if I offer a quiet suggestion. Open the door and let the lion out; he will take care of himself. Why, they are gone! He no sooner goes forth in this strength than his assailants flee. The way to meet infidelity is to spread the Bible. The answer to every objection against the Bible is the Bible.¹²

¹¹ 1 Peter 4:11a

¹² Charles Spurgeon, *Speeches by C. H. Spurgeon: At Home and Abroad* (1878), (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2008), 41.

The second aspect in the theology of Scripture is the clarity of Scripture. The clarity of Scripture means, as Grudem affirms, that the “Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”¹³

Everyone who is seeking God’s words and his advice can find them in the pages of the Bible. The clarity of Scripture is said to be such that even the simple can understand it rightly and be made wise by it. “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”¹⁴ Again we read, “The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”¹⁵ This should be a great encouragement to all believers: no believer should think himself or herself too foolish to read Scripture and understand it sufficiently to be made wise by it.¹⁶ The Bible was written in such a way that its spiritual truths can be understood by all who seek to read it with divine assistance, and with willingness to obey it. The understanding given to the simple ones, of which the psalmist speaks, is not reserved only to those who lack intellectual capacity, but also to the one who lacks sound judgment, who commits errors and needs to be guided to the correct standard. The word of God is so clear that anyone can acquire wisdom and be corrected; this concept should serve every Christian as a warning that one should not consider oneself so foolish as to be unable to comprehend the Scriptures.

¹³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 108.

¹⁴ Psalm 19:7b KJV

¹⁵ Psalm 119:130 ESV

¹⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 106.

The third aspect in the theology of Scripture is the necessity of Scripture. The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God's will, but is not necessary for knowing that God exists or for knowing something about God's character and moral laws. The Bible is necessary for the growth and the fortification of our faith. It is necessary to understand God's will for our life, relationships, and ministry. The word of God is indispensable. The psalmist wrote, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."¹⁷ In 2 Timothy we find that the word of God is "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."¹⁸

The fourth and last aspect in the theology of Scripture is the sufficiency of Scripture. The sufficiency of Scripture means that "Scripture contained all the words of God he intended his people to have at each stage of redemptive history, and that it now contains all the words of God we need for salvation for trusting him perfectly, and obeying him perfectly."¹⁹ The word of God is sufficient for everyone to have a life that pleases God and to have sufficient knowledge for salvation and obedience.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to clarify that the understanding of the Scriptures is more moral than intellectual, so again without the operation of the Holy Spirit it is not possible for man to understand his spiritual truths: "The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and

¹⁷ Psalm 119:105

¹⁸ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 127.

cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.”²⁰ The same Holy Spirit who inspires the word of God acts to enlighten it for our benefit. Enlightenment or illumination is the work of the Holy Spirit. He helps us to hear, receive, and correctly understand the message of the word of God. The way to benefit fully from the Spirit’s ministry of illumination is by serious Bible study, serious prayer, and serious response in obedience to whatever truths one has been shown already.

Grudem reminds us that the sufficiency of Scripture should encourage us as we try to discover what God would have us to think. The sufficiency of Scripture reminds us to add nothing to Scripture, and that we are to consider no other writings of equal value to Scripture; and also tell us that God does not require us to believe anything about himself or his redemptive work that is not found in Scripture.²¹

The Bible is the objective truth that all biblical preachers must preach, and all sermons must be grounded in these four indispensable characteristics of Scripture: authority, clarity, necessity and sufficiency.

Theology of Preaching

To best set forth the theological framework for this project, it becomes necessary to define *preaching*. I am going to use Andrew Watterson Blackwood’s definition of preaching. Blackwood (1882-1966) was a pastor, professor, and prolific author. An ordained Presbyterian, Blackwood spent seventeen years in the pastorate before turning to

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 2:14

²¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 130.

full-time seminary teaching. His teaching career began in 1926 when he accepted an appointment as Professor of English Bible at Louisville Seminary. The bulk of his teaching career, from 1930-1950, was spent at Princeton Theological Seminary, where he was chair of the Department of Practical Theology. In 1950, he moved to become Professor of Homiletics, at Temple University, where he served until his retirement in 1958. Blackwood states, "What do you mean by preaching? It means divine truth through personality, or the truth of God voiced by human personality to meet human needs."²² I could complement that definition with what Mary Hulst, Assistant Professor of Preaching from Calvin Theological Seminary, states, "A sermon is an oral event in which the speaker humbles him-or-her-self before the grand narrative of Scripture and, after seeking to understand what God is up to in a particular passage, invites the hearers to know God more."²³ As we are expounding and preaching the word of God, we can expect God's voice to be heard through the proclamation of the written word. We believe God has spoken through biblical authors, but we also need to believe that God speaks through what he has spoken. We need to be reminded, as stewards of the word of God, the words written by Isaiah about God's word: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."²⁴

I am going to trace a historical background of the Old Testament based in the role of the prophets whose "preaching" focused on the word of God delivered by the prophets. In the Old Testament, preaching, the proclamation of God's will and word, was done by

²² Andrew Watterson Blackwood, *The Preparation of Sermons* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1948), 13.

²³ Mary S. Hulst, *A Little Handbook for Preachers: Ten Practical Ways to a Better Sermon by Sunday* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 27.

²⁴ Isaiah 55:11

prophets. It was usually prefaced by the pronouncement, “Thus says the Lord.” But preaching, while beginning (in the human context) with the Spirit of God inspiring a person to declare the will and the word of God, has its roots in the nature of God himself. For it is clearly stated in the first chapter of Genesis that God spoke creation into existence. There we read, “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”²⁵ This effective and powerful word of God is the root of all relayed or mediated messages of God. It is good to remember here what is written in Romans “God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.”²⁶ In the New Testament, we can point to no higher example of the importance and power of the written word than that offered by Jesus when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Every one of Satan’s temptations of Jesus in the wilderness was answered by a reference to the revealed will of God, “It is written.”²⁷ In Acts, when the gospel came to Berea we are told that the noble Bereans “received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.”²⁸ To preach faithfully is to preach the written Word of God as we find it in the Scriptures. As we have seen in the few examples above, it is powerful. The author of Hebrews highlights the power of the word of God: “For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”²⁹

²⁵ Genesis 1:3

²⁶ Romans 4:17

²⁷ Romans 4:17

²⁸ Acts 17:11

²⁹ Hebrews 4:12

Preaching is about being biblical. Considering these definitions of preaching, from Blackwood and Hulst, and these preliminary issues, the question to be now analyzed is, “Why do we preach?” The Bible gives us numerous reasons, and I would highlight three that I think are very important for preachers.

In first place, we preach to bring everyone to saving faith by presenting the Good News to the lost in response to God’s call “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”³⁰

Second, we preach to instruct in both doctrine and practice. Through preaching, we communicate not only the doctrines of the Word of God, but also how people can put them into practice. Preaching is not only about informing people of what Scripture says, but also to explain how our listeners can put into practice the truths we find in the Word of God. The relationship between doctrine and practice is present when the preacher seeks to answer biblically the questions that the people of his time and generation are making while they face their needs and those of the world around them. Writing to his son in the faith Timothy, the Apostle Paul states, “If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.”³¹

Third, we preach to declare Jesus, the word of God. In the Gospel of John, we can find “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the

³⁰ Romans 10:14

³¹ 1 Timothy 4:6

glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”³²

Preaching is to announce and declare that Jesus, the Word, became flesh and lived among us. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life in whom we find the word of eternal life, hope and meaning for our lives. Preachers are the stewards of the Word who became flesh.

Preaching is a mission Jesus gave when he said his disciples “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”³³ John Broadus had this to say: “Preaching is characteristic of Christianity.”³⁴ Although preaching in the church occurs most often through an ordained minister, preaching the Word of God is a responsibility of all of Jesus’ disciples.

Now, I would like to discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching. The great British preacher Charles Spurgeon affirms: “If we do not have the Spirit was promised, we cannot perform the commission church Jesus gave.”³⁵ Spurgeon’s understanding of the work of the Spirit is rooted in his belief about the preacher’s task. He continues,

The presence and work of the Holy Spirit are the foundation of our confidence as to the wisdom and hopefulness of our life work. If we had not believed in the Holy Ghost we should have laid down our ministry long ere this, for “who is sufficient for these things?” Our hopes of success, and our strength for continuing in service, lie in our belief that the Spirit of the Lord rests upon us.³⁶

This is a great illustration of the power and illumination of the Holy Spirit related to preaching in this passage:

³² John 1:14

³³ Mark 16:15

³⁴ John Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 11.

³⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1979), 187.

³⁶ Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 189.

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: [...] In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy”³⁷

Peter’s preaching was strikingly successful! The success of our preaching, helping listeners to see themselves in our sermons and respond positively to the challenges of the message, comes also from the power of Holy Spirit.

To summarize what has been said about the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, the following quotation from John MacArthur Jr. says it well:

It is impossible to properly understand God’s objective revelation in Scripture apart from the illumination work of the Holy Spirit. Illumination enables us to comprehend God’s truth in the final and complete revelation of the Scripture. No clear understanding of Scripture leading to powerful preaching is possible without the Spirit’s work of illumination.³⁸

What is the implication of all this in the authority of today’s preaching? We cannot claim title to be a prophet of God like those in the Old Testament and, therefore, we dare not presume to receive our message from God like the prophets of the Old Testament. None of us has the good fortune of being an eyewitness to the life and times of our Lord Jesus like the Apostles. Yet, we can still claim the privilege to be stewards and heralds of God’s written word, and we proclaim the words inspired by the Holy Spirit and written by those prophets and apostles. God’s authority is no less seen in His written word than it was seen when He initially revealed it to His servants in the Old Testament and New Testament times.

³⁷ Acts 2:14-21

³⁸ John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1992), 339.

Theology of Persuasion

Lucy Lind Hogan, Professor of Preaching and Worship at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., offers a useful definition of the term *persuasion*:

“Persuasion is the process by which a person seeks to influence the decision making and/or actions of another person or persons by means of language and/or symbolic actions.”³⁹

Ronald Sleeth was a professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and defined persuasion as, “The process of influencing belief and behavior by the use of various appeals in order to win a desired response.”⁴⁰ Unlike coercion or manipulation, which controls through physical or emotional force and power, persuasion assumes the free choice of the person or persons who decided to act or believe. Further, we will discuss the relation between preaching and persuasion.

In his work *Rhetoric*, Aristotle examined the nature of the rhetorical process. Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric is, “An ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion.”⁴¹ In other words, it is primarily an ability concerned with the means of persuasion. Aristotle follows his definition by limiting the search for the means of persuasion and the principal strategies of persuasion to three factors: logos, ethos and pathos.

³⁹ Lucy Lind Hogan, “Persuasion.” s.v. *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), 360.

⁴⁰ Ronald E. Sleeth, *Persuasive Preaching* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1956), vii.

⁴¹ Lucy Lind Hogan, and Robert Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 29.

The term *logos* may be translated as “word,” “reason,” or “message.” It is the logical and rational argument of a speech taking the form of either deduction or induction. *Logos* is the appeal towards logical reason, thus the speaker wants to present an argument that appears to be sound to the audience. It encompasses the content and arguments of the speech. *Logos* is an appeal based on logic and is a way of persuading an audience by reason.⁴² When we focus on *logos*, preachers look not only at the creative power of the words, but also at the importance of choosing those words carefully. *Logos* in rhetoric is concerned with actively reflecting on the situation and then making appropriate choices of words and arguments given the situation, the listeners, and God’s call to bold proclamation.

The second aspect of persuasion is *ethos*. *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker. The effect of the persona or character projected by the speaker and what listeners think about preachers. *Ethos* is an appeal to ethics, and it is a means of convincing someone of the character or credibility of the persuader. A good speaker, according to Aristotle, was one who could convince his listeners that he was virtuous, had common sense, and had the best interest of his listeners at heart. Theologian Augustine of Hippo agreed, “The life of a speaker has greater weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any grandness of eloquence.”⁴³ Keller writes about *ethos*:

Your listeners will be convinced by your message only if they are convinced by you as a person. There is no escaping this. People do not simply experience your words, arguments, and appeals as disembodied messages; they are always sensing and evaluating the source. If they don’t know you, they are (usually unconsciously) gathering evidence to determine whether they like you, can relate to you, and respect you. They’re noticing whether you’re a happy or dour person, whether you

⁴² André Resner, “*Logos*” s.v. *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), 353.

⁴³ Resner, “*Ethos*”, 350.

are poised or nervous, whether you seem kind or hard or smug. They are looking for love, humility, conviction, joy, and power – for some integrity and congruence between what you are saying and who you are. Audiences are able to sense what kind of energy – or lack thereof – lies behind the speaking. They may see insecurity, the desire to impress, a lack of conviction, or self-righteousness – any of which closes their minds and hearts to the words.⁴⁴

A highlight to the ethos discussion appears in Paul’s letter to the church in Corinth:

“I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ I may indeed be untrained as a speaker, but I do have knowledge. We have made this perfectly clear to you in every way. Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge?”⁴⁵ The Apostle Paul struggled with ethos because his logos of the cross created confusion among his listeners, mainly non-Jews whose expectations were shaped by the powerful Greco-Roman rhetoric.⁴⁶

Paul’s dilemma helps us see that when identity is shaped by the gospel, for those who do not believe and have not accepted the message of the cross, which is Jesus Christ, our ethos will be projected from non-Christians preconceived idea of preachers, perhaps already loaded with stereotypes and negative images from negative experiences they had both with believers and preachers of the gospel.

The third aspect of persuasion is pathos. Pathos is the emotion generated by logos and ethos. Pathos is an appeal to emotion, and it is a way of moving an audience by creating an emotional response. The word “emotion” is derived from the Latin verb

⁴⁴ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Viking, 2015), 191-192.

⁴⁵ 2 Corinthians 11:5-7

⁴⁶ Resner, “Ethos,” 350.

movere, which means *to move*. The appeal to emotion is an effort to understand how to move people to act through a speech. Because emotions move humans to do things, its role in motivation can be compared to the action of spark plugs in an automobile. Gasoline may enter a combustion chamber, but without the spark igniting the process, nothing happens. Control of pathos is control of the spark. It is very important to note at this point what Arthurs affirms: “Ethical (and effective) communicators use pathos to prompt people to act in accord to truth.”⁴⁷ The use of pathos (emotions and feelings) to induce the audience to act contrary to reason is an unethical procedure.

Pathos leads and influences decision-making. Arnold and Wilson state simply that “people do not reason or feel, they reason because they feel, they feel because they think they have reason.”⁴⁸ The great theologian and Christian philosopher C. S. Lewis states: “People don’t ask for facts in making up their minds. They would rather have one good, soul-satisfying emotion than a dozen facts.”⁴⁹

Pathos is primary in human decision-making because God made us to respond to emotional appeals, and He himself uses pathos. Pathos is crucial, not incidental, to God’s communication. As Robinson states: “Some passages are alive with hope, some warn, some create a sense of joy, some flash with anger at injustice, others surge with triumph. A true expository sermon should create in the listener the mood produced in the reader. The task

⁴⁷ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 591.

⁴⁸ Robinson and Larson, *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, 592.

⁴⁹ Wayne Martindale and Jerry Root, *The Quotable Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1989), 482.

of the poet, the playwright, the artist, the prophet, and the preacher overlap at this point – to make people feel and see.”⁵⁰

Logos is the content of the speech, ethos is the perception of the speaker, and pathos is the emotion generated by the first two.⁵¹ Cicero, the Roman philosopher and orator from the first century, wrote:

For who is ignorant that the highest power of an orator consists in exciting the minds of men to anger, or to grief, or in recalling them from these more violent emotions to gentleness and compassion? Which power will never be able to effect its object by eloquence, unless in him who has obtained a thorough insight into the nature of mankind, and all the passions of humanity, and those causes by which our minds are either impelled or restrained.⁵²

The three elements of the persuasion: logos, ethos and pathos are very useful and valid for biblical preaching.

Preaching and Persuasion

Homiletics books consider the process of preparing and presenting biblical messages. Many of the books deal with the structure of a sermon and how to prepare and organize an idea in a way that communicates well. At the same time, homileticians also imply the need for preaching to effect change in the listeners, but a discussion about the process of change is sometimes missing. I believe Scripture mandates that the goal of preaching is ultimately to effect change in listeners, that is, to bring them into conformity

⁵⁰ Haddon Robinson, *Making a Difference in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1999), 82-83.

⁵¹ John C. Holbert, “Pathos/Feeling,” s.v. *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), 358.

⁵² John C. Holbert, “Pathos/Feeling,” s.v. *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, 358.

with the will and word of God. Larry Overstreet, adjunct professor in the Ph.D. program at Piedmont International University, defines persuasive preaching as, “The process of preparing biblical, expository messages using a persuasive pattern and presenting them through verbal and nonverbal communication means to autonomous individuals who can be convicted and/or taught by God’s Holy Spirit, in order to alter or strengthen their attitudes and beliefs toward God, His Word, and other individuals resulting in their lives being transformed into the image of Christ.”⁵³

The ultimate goal of preaching is not the transmission of information, but the transformation of persons. Persuasion in preaching that encompasses the elements of ethos, pathos, and logos, in no way rules out the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit who convinces man of sin, righteousness, and judgment. A sermon must be persuasive speech; persuasion requires skills; skills require preparation and practice. The use of ethos, pathos and logos are some of the skills utilized in persuasion. However, studying persuasion in preaching does not replace the role of the Holy Spirit, who is irreplaceable in convincing people about sin, righteousness and judgment.⁵⁴ The search to practice and use persuasion techniques is part (or an integral element) of a search for excellence in preaching. Further, the knowledge and ability to use persuasion techniques should never cause the preacher to neglect academic rigor in preparing the sermon and delivering it with excellence.

The need for preaching to be persuasive often raises questions about what strategies are ethical and which are unethical. Some Christian communicators carefully set forth principles regulating ethical persuasion. Baumann, like Ayres and Miller, summarizes his

⁵³ R. Larry Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 14.

⁵⁴ John 16:8

guidelines into three statements of what is not ethical. He argues, first, that it is unethical to be dishonest. There is no excuse for deliberate deceit, for intentionally misleading an audience, regardless of the end in view. Second, it is also unethical to deceive the audience about your intention. When the speaker has a goal, a predetermined end for his listeners, and seeks to deceive them regarding this intention, he has violated the truth. Third, persuasion which either overtly or covertly attacks the basic freedom of respondents subjugates his self-determination and is unethical. We also could add that unethical persuasion includes manipulation for the purpose of selfish gain by the persuader. Larry Overstreet citing David Larsen, Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, provides a helpful chart, which sets forth the contrasting character traits of the preachers who use the opposing emphasis in preaching.⁵⁵

Table 1. Contrast between the manipulator and persuader

The Manipulator	The Persuader
Deception, phoniness	Honesty, transparency
Lack of awareness, tunnel vision	Awareness, real interest, aliveness
Control, concealment	Openness, spontaneity, freedom
Cynicism, distrust	Trust, faith, belief

Ethics in persuasive communication is a critical issue for the biblical preacher who desires to effect biblical change in people's lives, while adhering to biblical standards while doing so. Biblical preachers must examine their own motives, be consistent with biblical principles, and then go forward in presenting persuasive messages with the power of Holy Spirit and in the authority of God's Word.

⁵⁵ Overstreet, *Persuasive Preaching*, 170.

This concludes the Theological Framework section of this work attempting to look for answers and clues for the research topic, “How can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative world?” We pondered the three sections in this chapter Theology of Scripture, Theology of Preaching and Theology of Persuasion. The next chapter is a review of the literature that touches on that research question.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This thesis-project deals with the research question, “How can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative postmodern world?” My thesis is that even in an anti-authoritative age, when listeners believe or are convinced that the speaker has high character they lower their skepticism, thus leading to effective persuasion in preaching. In this chapter, the literature review, I situate my own research in the existing body of research by reviewing literature dealing with postmodernity and preaching, giving special attention to works that deal with skepticism and ethos.

This chapter is divided into three parts. First, I will summarize definitions of the postmodern phenomenon, indicating which view this thesis-project adopts. I will also detail the major characteristics of postmodernity according to some of the leading authors in this field, to provide the cultural and philosophical context for this thesis-project. Second, I will briefly describe the theory of ethos, according to some authors, indicating the view adopted by this thesis-project. Third, I will review pertinent literature on preaching and postmodernity, focusing on advice and suggestions by the authors regarding how to preach in these postmodern days. This final section helps position my own research on credibility, skepticism, and postmodern listeners.

Postmodern Definitions

Postmodernity is a very complex concept to define. Defining it is not a simple task because there is no unanimity among theorists about its beginning and the characteristics, which encompass the phenomenon. There are not many clear and well-defined contours to this complex phenomenon, which many refer to as “postmodernity.” We live in very peculiar times with characteristics that, if not distinct from other times, are nevertheless very intense and accentuated in our days. There is no singular postmodern point of view. I will now bring up important concepts about postmodernity and its features according to some of the leading authors in the field, briefly describing their writings, and I will indicate with which definition this thesis-project best identifies.

Stanley Grenz was the Pioneer McDonald professor of theology at Carey Theological College and a professor of theological studies at Mars Hill Graduate School. In 1996 he wrote an important book about this theme titled *A Primer on Postmodernism*. In this book Grenz discussed the postmodern ethos, its worldview, the rise of the modern world, the prelude to postmodernism, postmodernism philosophers’ understanding of the gospel, and the postmodern context. The book was developed in three stages and its purpose was: to help pastors decipher postmodernism providing an instrument for the basic understanding of the postmodern structure, especially its intellectual presentation. This objective was motivated by two presuppositions: first, although the term postmodernism is usually absent from the common vocabulary, postmodern principles and values are transmitted on a daily basis; and, second, to reach people in the postmodern context, we must engage in the task of decoding its implications for the gospel. For Grenz, “Postmodernism rejects the understanding of our knowledge of the world that stands at the

foundation of the enlightenment project and modernity. Specifically, the postmodern era has abandoned the notion of an objective world.”¹ Grenz states that postmodernists “reject the enlightenment’s quest for universal, supra-cultural, timeless truth in favor of searching out truth as the expression of a specific community.”² In this sense, postmodern truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths. Most postmodernists believe that this plurality of truths can exist alongside each another. The postmodern consciousness, therefore, entails a radical kind of relativism and pluralism.³

Postmodern thought fundamentally departs from its predecessor, modernity. Whereas modernists believed that objective truth could be perceived by reason, postmodern philosophers raised the argument that human reason offers no more than interpretations of the world with which it relates. Grenz names two philosophers as fundamental for the understanding of what constitutes postmodernity: Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and Michel Foucault.

Nietzsche was a nineteenth century Prussian philosopher, philologist, cultural critic, poet and composer, born in present-day Germany. He wrote many critical articles about religion, morality, contemporary culture, philosophy and science. According to Nietzsche, he claims that the world is highly complex, with no single event being the same as another. Therefore, when people think about the laws of nature, patterns and categories, they are actually robbing reality of its complexity and imposing onto the world their simplistic

¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 40.

² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

³ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

framework. Consequently, he rejects the idea that reason reveals the reality that exists outside of people. In opposition to that, Nietzsche's argument is that reason creates a reality in people's minds, which can never correspond to the complex reality of the exterior world.⁴ Thus, knowledge no longer is an act of discovery but one of creation. Human beings organize their experiences with reality into a system that gives meaning to existence. Because of this, Nietzsche concludes that values were not something objective and absolute that can be found through the investigation of nature, but instead, they are human creations. As we can see, postmodernism reverses the way we understand the world. Before, in the enlightenment ideal, the question was to discover the laws that governed nature and consequently also governed humans. Now, in postmodernism, interpretation gains strength. Before, there was an objective reality, common to all humans, waiting to be unveiled. Now, reality is considered unattainable, and an individual effort to understand the world no longer brings us to a common point, but to a myriad of individual interpretations.⁵

Further developing this thought, French philosopher Michel Foucault presents the logical sequence of this relativistic argument: if reality is an individual creation, and not an object equally accessible to all, then any knowledge that tries to overlap with another will be committing violence. He claims that society creates knowledge to exert power over people. That is, every attempt to create universal knowledge is in fact the destruction of all the various forms of knowledge, competing interpretations. This thought led postmodern philosophers to reject yet another of their predecessors' principles: the search for a

⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1968), 14-15.

⁵ Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* in *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1976), 46-47.

universal metanarrative. In other words, while the modernists sought a metanarrative that would replace the old myths and unify humanity toward progress, postmodernists reject any attempt to universalize, and accept that different narratives coexist in parallel, even if conflicting.⁶

A second leading scholar on postmodernism is Gene Edward Veith Jr. is a professor of literature at Patrick Henry College, director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary and the author of various books about Christianity and culture. The source I will review here is *Postmodern Times – a Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture*. Although Gene Veith's book is now more than twenty years old, I have chosen it as a foundational text to show that even in that time, facts that philosophers connect with our times, were already present.

For Veith, postmodernity can be summarized by the statement that there is no absolute truth. He cites a survey that shows that sixty-six percent of Americans believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth. Among young adults, the percentage is even higher: seventy-two percent of those between ages eighteen and twenty-five do not believe absolutes exist. The survey also shows that fifty-three percent of those who call themselves evangelical Christians believe that there are no absolutes. This means that the majority of those who say that they believe in the authority of the Bible and know Christ as their Savior, nevertheless agree with those who believe that there is no such thing as absolute truth.⁷ For Veith, “the claims of Christianity are not denied, they are rejected because they

⁶ Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1995), 27-28.

⁷ Gene Edward Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994), 16.

purport to be true.”⁸ The idea of the author is that those who believe that there are no absolutes will dismiss those who reject relativism as intolerant, as trying to force their beliefs on other people. As in modernism or Christianity, postmodernism also defends a truth, that is, to say that there is no exclusive or absolute truth. Most postmodernists are quite intolerant with their truth that there is no absolute truth. Instead of the relativism of postmodernism leading to tolerance, postmodernists have become intolerant, affirming that there is no such thing as absolute truth.

A third leading scholar on postmodernism is Graham Johnston. Johnston is senior pastor of Subiaco Church of Christ in Western Australia and an adjunct lecturer in homiletics at Perth Bible College. Communicating God’s Word is more than just speaking the truth; it is being heard and understood as well. Graham Johnston made significant contribution exploring postmodern concepts, bringing an understandable and useful focus of postmodern world. He holds degrees from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Dallas Theological Seminary. In 2001 Johnston released *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, a book in which he raises one major question, how is biblical preaching changing, now that a recent Barna Report survey shows us that two-thirds of Americans no longer believe in objective truth?⁹ As the other authors contend, Johnston argues that Postmodernity’s roots begin in modernity, or in the enlightenment. For the author, the enlightenment grew to be a period of scientific certainty, human optimism, and the belief in inevitable progress toward a better world. In that age, reason supplanted the role of faith. True knowledge which corresponds to reality, exists as a certainty with reason being the

⁸ Veith Jr., *Postmodern Times*, 19.

⁹ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 8.

sole arbiter of determining truth. Humanity was basically good and by using the powers of reason and ingenuity, people could solve all worldly problems. For Johnston, in the postmodern world people are no longer convinced that knowledge is inherently good. The enlightenment myth of inevitable progress brought to the last century an optimism which was replaced by postmodernism's gnawing pessimism. The author details some hallmarks of postmodern people: they reject objective truth, are skeptical and suspicious of authority.¹⁰ The author considers it beneficial that postmodern listeners are continuing to search for the transcendent and for community. These two characteristics open the opportunity for the gospel to be preached, heard, and accepted. Johnston continues his analysis of postmodernity and says, "In the light of the disillusionment with the enlightenment, society is naturally skeptical. Postmodernism maintains that a person can really only say 'according to my perception, this is true.'"¹¹

For Johnston, since all truth is relative, postmodernity is wary of anyone who claims to possess the truth. This makes preaching an extremely challenging and complicated task, for we preach Jesus who claims to be the truth. Johnston identifies some strategies that preachers need to successfully communicate the truth of Scripture to distracted and uninterested audiences.¹² Preachers should not expect to connect without first understanding who their listeners are and how they think and choose. Preachers also need to be challenged to make the effort and take the risk necessary to reach out to a different kind of churchgoer. At the same time, Johnston argues that they must not surrender their

¹⁰ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 26.

¹¹ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 30.

¹² This is found in Johnston's *Preaching to a Postmodern World* chapters 3-7.

expositional method by preaching culture rather than the message of the Bible: “Twenty-first century listeners may prefer idols but they lack a God large enough to sustain their lives in complicated times.”¹³

A fourth leading scholar on postmodernism is Zack Eswine. Eswine serves the Riverside Community in Webster Grooves, Missouri as senior pastor. In that role he focuses his time on community development, preaching, leadership formation, and pastoral care. Eswine has served in pastoral roles for nearly twenty years. He served as assistant professor of homiletics and director for the Doctor of Ministry program for six years at Covenant Theological Seminary and is leading their preaching training now. The back cover of *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* poses a question and a promise: “Do you think a postmodern audience may render your preaching post-relevant? Think again. You can make an impact on the rising global village – starting now.” He seeks to help the parish pastor connect with the current culture, an appropriate goal since connecting with our culture is a struggle every pastor faces as he reaches out to the community and even within his own congregation. And this is a struggle for which there are many unsatisfactory solutions. Blessedly, the answers Eswine offers include neither changing God’s truth nor gimmicks for attracting people disinclined to listen. Rather, his advice is centered on the preacher’s need to rely on God’s power for people in every context, particularly by proclaiming a Christ-centered word. The book is essentially a homiletics textbook that is divided into three parts.

Part One seeks to reorient the sermon as a concept for the post-everything world using various homiletic tools and processes. Part Two assumes that “God already provided

¹³ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 145.

what we need to navigate a post-everything world.”¹⁴ It uses God’s biblical models for molding our sermon practice. Part Three lets biblical models guide our preaching to help contextualize the message with practical insights for a world that would normally not receive concepts like “Old Testament war passages” or “hell.” The author states that generations are complex. A post-everything world is saturated with multiple contexts and cultural assumptions. Some contexts raise questions about space stations, human cloning, domestic partnerships, high technology and postmodernism. Others face issues regarding refugee camps, the bombing of our churches, going without food, dying from AIDS, or protecting family from genocide or child slavery.¹⁵ “Multicultural neighbors expose us to multiple views of truth.”¹⁶ Competing truth claims confuse people regarding what is considered moral and pleasing to God. The homiletic we offer must take these variances into account.

Another important author for the development of this thesis is Timothy Keller. Keller is the founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, New York. He is a graduate of Bucknell University, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (M.Div., 1975) and Westminster Theological Seminary, from where he received his Doctor of Ministry degree in 1981. In *Preaching – Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (2015), Keller presents a preaching manifesto that targets “all those who are wrestling with how to communicate life-changing biblical truth to people at any level in an increasingly

¹⁴ Zack Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 19.

¹⁵ Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 13.

¹⁶ Eswine, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World*, 14.

skeptical age.”¹⁷ Keller is a dissonant voice in postmodern discourse, because of the nomenclature he uses, has a different view of all the authors approached heretofore. . His is a different point of view that goes one step beyond simply reminding us that we need to remember where we are, but also reminding us of the need to correctly identify the spirit of the age.

Keller’s argument is that we are actually not in a postmodern age, but in a late modern one - this is his point. Citing Charles Taylor’s work *The Secular Age*, he defends that “secular people are not more objective, but instead have embraced a new, constructed web of alternate beliefs about the nature of things that are not self-evident to all, are no more empirically provable than any of the other religious beliefs, require enormous leaps of faith, and are subject to their own array of serious problems and objections.”¹⁸ The author states that many have labeled the changes of our time as the postmodern turn. For those who define our days as postmodernity, the modern era placed its confidence in reason and science, while postmodern age is marked by a loss of the belief that one can achieve a rational, controllable order or arrive at certainty of anything at all. There has been a turn toward experience and openness. Keller states that this is all true, “but it overlooks the fact that underneath the discontinuities with the modern past there are even stronger continuities.”¹⁹ It is his understanding that what we have now is less a reversal of modernity

¹⁷ Timothy Keller, *Preaching - Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York, NY: Viking, 2015), 7.

¹⁸ Keller, *Preaching*, 124.

¹⁹ Keller, *Preaching*, 122.

than it is an intensification of its deepest patterns. So, it would be better to talk of our late-modern rather than our postmodern times.²⁰

The work of P. T. Forsyth (1848–1921), a Scottish theologian, is used by Keller to support his arguments. Forsyth identified a key theme of modernity: that modern people believe that they are their own authority.²¹ For Keller, secularism, understood as not simply an absence of belief, is one of the biggest late-modern characteristics of our time. Christians often accept this claim and respond by getting out their proofs and other rational bona fides. Secularism is its own set of beliefs that should be open to examination. Keller identifies some statements that define secularism, “Keep your religious views private” and “What right do you have to tell anyone else what is right or wrong for them?” The secular ideas of justice and morality are self-authorizing.²²

These are the main works that assisted in the development of this work. Each work and each author is full of valid and precious information to assist in arriving at a better and more accurate perception of postmodernity. The closest vision to this thesis-project is the first, presented and defended by Stanley Grenz for it gives a historically and philosophically well-grounded narrative of the emergence of postmodernity and also because it presents alternatives and solutions for preaching within the context of postmodernity. We will now move onto a bibliographical review of ethos.

²⁰ Keller, *Preaching*, 123.

²¹ Keller, *Preaching*, 121.

²² Keller, *Preaching*, 146.

Ethos Theory

The concept of ethos is developed by many authors. In this section of the literature review we will do some exploration of these different conceptualizations of ethos and disclose with which of those this work most identifies. Before putting forward the various conceptualizations let us look at the word and its origin.

To a better understand the concept ethos let first understand the etymology and evolution of the word ethos. Ethos (ἦθος, ἔθος is a Greek word originally meaning “accustomed place” as in ἦθεα ἵππων, i.e. “the habitats of horses,” equivalent to the Latin “mores.”²³ Ethos forms the root of ethikos (ἠθικός), meaning “moral, showing moral character.”²⁴ As an adjective in the neuter plural form ta ethika (τὰ ἠθικά), it is used for the study of morals, and it is the origin of the modern English word “ethics.” The definition and the word ethos that this thesis-project will use is ethikos (ἠθικός), meaning “moral character.”

Aristotle (384–322 BC) was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist. Along with Plato, Aristotle is considered the Father of Western Philosophy. He was one of the firsts Greek philosophers to write, study and systematize the modes of persuasion, the speaker's appeal to the audience. Ethos is one of the three modes of persuasion and is an appeal to the authority or credibility of the presenter. For Aristotle ethos is defined in his monumental work *Rhetoric*. Before we deal specifically with ethos' theory, I shall give a brief overview of the origin of ethos. Aristotle' s objective with his *Rhetoric* was to give an eminently

²³ Proscurcin Jr., *Der Begriff Ethos bei Homer* (Heilderbeg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014), 162–163.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1963), 1103.

philosophical treatment of the subject as opposed to the careless treatment that the rhetoricians and sophists of that time had given to the subject. More specifically, many believe that the Aristotelian reflection on the subject was a response to the rhetorical conception of Isocrates of Athens. Unlike Plato, who in the dialogue *Gorgias* condemns rhetoric and in the dialogue *Phaedrus* subordinates rhetoric to philosophy, Aristotle's research on rhetoric – albeit eminently philosophical – seeks to confer autonomy for the rhetorical technique, dissociating it from the vigilance of philosophy, a position with which Plato disagreed, considering rhetoric to be ethically dangerous.

Aristotle affirms, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion."²⁵ Persuasion, as Lucy Lind Hogan defines it is "the process by which a person or persons seek to influence the decision making and/or actions of another person or persons by means of language and/or symbolic actions."²⁶ And Aristotle writes, "Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. Aristotle helps us to locate and situate the ethos theory in a major concept and definition showing its background and context. Ethos is one of the components of rhetoric, whose purpose is persuasion. This thesis works with the authority of preaching in postmodernity trying to determine a way to persuade the postmodern to listen the gospel. This is the reason why ethos as a way of persuasion is so important.

The first depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof,

²⁵ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts. (New York, NY: Modern Library, 1954), 24.

²⁶ Lucy Lind Hogan, "Persuasion" *New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008), 360.

provided by the words of the speech itself.”²⁷ There are, then, three means of effecting persuasion. “The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotion, that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited.”²⁸ Logos, ethos and pathos. Since this work is focused in only one of the three elements of persuasion, we will focus on Aristotle’s position about ethos.

Aristotle writes, “Persuasion is achieved by the speaker’s personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided.”²⁹ This statement is fundamental for the development of this thesis’ hypothesis, because it is based on the idea that when a listener attributes credibility to a speaker or a preacher and puts faith and trust in his character, the listener decreases his resistance and is more open to persuasion and the content of the preacher’s discourse. Aristotle states, “Since rhetoric exists to affect the giving of decisions . . . the orator must not only try to make the argument of his speech demonstrative and worthy of belief; he must also make his own character look right and put his hearers, who are to decide, into the right frame of mind.”³⁰

²⁷ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 25.

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 25.

²⁹ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 25.

³⁰ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 25.

To understand the origins of the discussions about ethos as an element of persuasion it is worth remembering that Aristotle deepens his theory about ethos by stating that “there are three things which inspire confidence in the orator’s own character – the three, namely, that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, good moral, and good character.”³¹ For Aristotle this is so important that he says “anyone who is thought to have all three of these good qualities will inspire in his audience.”³² He also said that ethos consists of three sub-parts: (1) good moral character, (2) good sense, (3) good will. If the writer or speaker can project an image of good moral character, then the audience will think that he or she can be trusted. The second element is good sense. Good sense comes from a Greek word, which means “practical wisdom.” Good sense is demonstrated when the writer or speaker shows that he or she is competent, intelligent, confident, knowledgeable, wise, qualified, and an expert on the subject. The third element of ethos identified by Aristotle is the goodwill of the speaker towards the audience. This concerns the speaker’s intent and motivation. You need to show your audience that your intention and motivation is to be useful, to help educate, to inspire, to inform and to entertain. These motivations are positive and demonstrate your goodwill towards the audience, which is strengthened when you are able to demonstrate your motivation, intention and commitment. This is the position Aristotle takes on ethos.

Donald Sunukjian wrote an important text about the power of ethos in communication focusing on the role of the preacher. I am using this text and the author to approach a little more of the theme of this thesis that is the challenge of the authority of

³¹ Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 91.

³² Aristotle, *The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle*, 91.

preaching in postmodernity, being ethos a fundamental component in giving credit to the preacher's authority. For Sunukjian the term ethos comes from classical rhetoric and refers to the perceived credibility of the speaker.³³ A preacher's ethos is the opinion his listeners have of him as a person: "If their opinion of him is high, he will have high ethos, or great credibility, with them. This means they will be inclined to believe whatever he says. On the other hand, if their opinion of him is low, his ethos or credibility will be poor, and they will turn him off even before he speaks."³⁴ It should be noted that according to Sunukjian's theory, ethos is a perceived quality, not an actual one. It is not what the speaker is, but what the listener thinks him to be.³⁵ While Aristotle wrote about three different dimension of ethos, for Sunukjian there are two different parts: competency and character. In fact, Sunukjian seems to condense into two elements, competency and character, what Aristotle described in three different elements of ethos: good moral, sense and good will.

Sunukjian is thinking of the ethos already applied to preaching and to preachers, while Aristotle is thinking of a public speaker. This difference makes the author to use the examples of what he is writing, bringing his theoretical concepts closer to his practical examples. About competency, Sunukjian writes that experimenters have determined that speakers communicate competency and gain credibility by means of an attractive appearance, a fluent delivery, an organized message, and an evident awareness of the human event.³⁶ About character, his idea is that if a listener has a high view of the speaker's character, seeing him or her as without guile and growing in godliness, the listener is more

³³ Donald Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

³⁴ Donald Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

³⁵ Donald Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

³⁶ Donald Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 256.

apt to be affected by his words. If, however, he or she feels that the speaker is self-centered, manipulative, or deceitful, they will be less likely to accept his message. This is an important issue for this thesis-project's idea and hypothesis because Sunukjian claims that "listeners respond more readily to a speaker they like and can trust. Even more important than the perception of competency is the conviction that the speaker is a man of admirable personal qualities and that he has the hearers' best interest at heart."³⁷ The idea of this thesis-project is that a preacher own character is perhaps the most persuasive power, which increases confidence, and trustworthiness in listeners and lowers skepticism, doubt, distrust, which is what will be proved on the next chapter.

Emory Griffin wrote a book that was selected by the Religious Speech Communication Association as the Book of the Year of 1977. The book is *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion*. Griffin states about ethos, "Who says something is just as important as what is said."³⁸ Griffin places Aristotle as one of the pioneers to address I ethos in *Rhetoric*. Griffin writes that Aristotle "uses the Greek term ethos to describe the characteristics of a speaker that makes his listeners want to believe him no matter what he says. He claims that ethos – ethical appeal – is the most important part of influence. If we believe we are listening to a good man, his cause will seem probable."³⁹ For Griffin, however, credibility is about one specific audience. "Just because we've earned the respect of one group here is no guarantee we'll be heard by another."⁴⁰

³⁷ Donald Sunukjian, *The Credibility of the Preacher*, 260.

³⁸ Emory A. Griffin, *The Mind Changers: The Art of Christian Persuasion* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1976), 115.

³⁹ Griffin, *The Mind Changers*, 116.

⁴⁰ Griffin, *The Mind Changers*, 119.

For Griffin there are three different components of ethos: first, authoritativeness which means that the speaker is perceived as qualified, an expert, informed, intelligent, trained and reliable as opposed to unqualified, inexperienced, uninformed, unintelligent, untrained, and unreliable. Second: character, which means that the speaker is perceived by the listeners as friendly, kind, just, unselfish, pleasant and honest as opposed to unfriendly, cruel, unjust, selfish, unpleasant and dishonest. Third: dynamism, which means that the speaker is perceived by his listeners as active, open, bold, cheerful, emphatic and responsive as opposed to passive, closed, timid, gloomy, hesitant and unresponsive. In his theory of ethos Griffin brings the concept to the concept of the “sleepers effect.”⁴¹ There are two explanations for the sleepers effect.

The first is that if the message comes from a good person when the person listens to a new idea, he feels he can relax, having thoughts such as, “Surely a man as good as this would not say anything wrong or harmful.” So, the idea is to accept without critical examination. But as time goes by, the listener may forget where and from whom he heard the idea, so he reexamines it with critical eyes. By analyzing the statement and the idea again he rejects it. The same thing happens when the message comes from a person perceived as bad and untrustworthy. The listener resists because he does not trust the speaker. After a while, though, he forgets who sponsored the idea and comes under the influence of the idea itself because he discovers, after some thinking and research, that the idea is true.

The second side of the sleepers effect is that the effects of credibility continue only when the message is tasted, chewed, and digested. Therefore, the author says “what all this

⁴¹ Griffin, *The Mind Changers*, 125

means is that when we talk about Jesus Christ, we've got to make sure that people focus on message, not the messenger"⁴² because the credibility is in the eye of the beholder and a speaker's credibility is constantly changing. Although Griffin states that people should focus on the message not the messenger, this is a hard thing to do, because it is not possible to separate those things. Both things, message and messenger, come together. Listeners are constantly evaluating the message through the words, the expertise and the life of the preacher. One thought from Griffin's theory that confirms this is that the author teaches preachers to think of credibility as a bank account. A person builds up credit through his words and deeds meeting with the other's approval. These deposits increase his potential to persuade. The speaker can spend some of this acceptance capital in order to convince others. But if he or she keeps spending and spending without acquiring new resources, the speaker will go bankrupt – he or she will use up all his or her credibility.

Dave McClellan in *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out* he writes about why we trust some speakers and dismiss others. The idea of the author is that speech reveals us. McClellan also mentions and points to the beginning and basis of the discussion of ethos in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. McClellan defines ethos as "the ability a speaker has to be authentic in the act of speaking."⁴³ For him, the preacher is a persuader because preachers are trying to affect attitudes and behavior during the sermon. Preachers are asking people to view something differently or to change the way they respond to situations. They want to bring people to a point of a decision. McClellan brings up Aristotle's concept that

⁴² Griffin, *The Mind Changers*, 125.

⁴³ Dave McClellan, *Preaching by Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out* (Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014), 26.

ethos is the most persuasive force with which to reach the objective to make the speaker credible.⁴⁴ The author shares some ideas to build and increase credibility in the midst of a sermon, and highlights the issue of authority. He sees authority as the sense of confidence that is transmitted from a speaker to an audience. In McClellan's view, people respect someone who challenges them and questions the status quo. Listeners can sense when someone is trying to campaign for their approval. McClellan concludes his thoughts about ethos citing the words of Jesus: "For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34 NASB), and states, "ethos is the revealing of the heart by the mouth."⁴⁵

James Robert Andrews in *The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism* he develops and focuses his concept of ethos by stating that "the perception an audience has of a speaker is what finally determines ethos; it ultimately rests not on a catalogue of more or less objective personal qualities possessed by the speaker, but, rather, on what is known about those qualities and how they are interpreted by listeners."⁴⁶ The author gives an example: "Whether Carl Sagan or Jerry Falwell is the best authority on how the earth was formed depends on who is listening."⁴⁷ Much of the audience's impression of a speaker and its willingness to listen to him or her are impacted by what the audience knows or believe it knows about the speaker prior to a communication event. The crucial point, according to Andrews, is that although message delivery does seem to influence the audience's perceptions, it does not seem to be the most critical determining factor in and of itself.

⁴⁴ McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 27.

⁴⁵ McClellan, *Preaching by Ear*, 30.

⁴⁶ James Robertson Andrews, *The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1983), 40.

⁴⁷ Andrews, *The Practice of Rhetorical Criticism*, 40.

What the critic tries to assess is the potential interactions between content and delivery in an effort to uncover aspects that could contribute to the overall perception formed by audience and, accordingly, could have an impact on the speaker's ethos.

All approaches about ethos theory have great value, both theoretical and practical. All significantly contribute to a better understanding of the importance of ethos in our days and its influence on the preaching of the gospel. The line of thought with which this work most identifies is Donald Sunukjian's approach for his clear definition of ethos, by subdividing it into two different aspects: competence and credibility, and highlighting credibility as the most influential aspect of ethos. Inside Sunukjian's point of view about ethos, becomes clearer the point that I will highlight within this thesis that the credibility of the preacher helps the postmodern listeners to reduce their skepticism about the authority of the preacher.

Now let us move onto the third part of this literature review, examining preaching and postmodernity.

Preaching and Postmodernity

In this third section of the literature review chapter, I will address some of the main authors dealing with the topic about preaching and postmodernity. I will review pertinent literature on preaching and postmodernity, focusing on advice and suggestions by the authors regarding how to preach in these postmodern days. Postmodernity has brought many challenges to the preaching of the gospel. The preaching of the Gospel is an activity inherent to the pastoral office. Thus, it is increasingly urgent to revisit the fundamental ideals of pastoral ministry, in the New Testament and with the main authors that deal with

the theme, to provide a firm foundation for the excellence of the pastoral preaching ministry also in postmodernity. The high importance of preaching remains the same, as part of pastoral ministry, and its mission remains unchanged. In 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul says, “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.” At all times, the excellence of pastoral preaching derives directly from its mission: to proclaim the word of God. The task of the shepherd is still one and the same, according to Michael Horton:

Preaching Scripture is preaching Christ; to preach Christ is to preach the cross; to preach the cross is to preach grace; to preach grace is to preach justification; to preach justification is to assign all of salvation to the glory of God and respond to this Good News in grateful obedience through our vocation in the world.⁴⁸

To help us clarifying with important ideas and concepts, let us know four different authors and what they have written about Preaching and Postmodernity.

Stanley Grenz initially shows that postmodernism and evangelical Christians, have a common position: the rejection of enlightenment’s epistemology, which was expressed in the excessive appreciation of knowledge, objectivity and evaluation as something inherently good.⁴⁹ For an approximation of the postmodern cultural context, he proposes four steps in which the Gospel must be proclaimed. According to Grenz, it is first necessary to overcome the individualism of postmodern culture. Promoting individualism was one of the hallmarks of postmodernity. However, as it has been demonstrated, the postmodern world has become individualistic. Thus, Grenz believes that the emphasis on the individual

⁴⁸ Eric Landry and Michael Scott Horton, *The Reformation Then and Now: 25 Years of Modern Reformation - Articles Celebrating 500 Years of the Reformation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2017), 124.

⁴⁹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 236.

should not be completely removed from the proclamation of the Gospel today. Nevertheless, it should also stress the inevitable role of the community and social networking, for that is precisely where individuals know themselves in their personal identities. Additionally, the importance of the faith community in this attempt should be recognized since the current generation is not impressed by speeches. Even the community members should participate in this process. This is the role of a post-individualistic proclamation.⁵⁰ Secondly, one should present the Gospel in a post-rationalist perspective. Grenz recalls that one of the hallmarks of modernity was the appreciation of reason. Even with the postmodern critique of rationalism, he advocates that the presentation of the Gospel in this context should not be anti-intellectual, but this intelligentsia must be at the service of a touch with reality and lead to the discovery of the divine truth. So the truth will not be expressed only in the category of rational certainty, typical of modernity, but will also point to the fundamental reality that God is beyond human rationality. In this sense, the encounter with God must be proclaimed at the center of an experience through Jesus Christ, a transforming reality. Thus, it emphasizes the role of the intellectual dimension in the context of human experience.⁵¹ Grenz points out, thirdly, a post-dualistic Gospel. For him, the Christian proclamation must overcome the fundamental dualism between “mind” and “matter” present in modernism, developing a biblical holism. He recognizes that modern dualism exerted influence on Christian thought but proposes to cease this influence in favor of a Gospel that speaks to the human being in an integral manner, either in your rational-intellectual aspect, emotional-affective or physical and sexual. This holistic postmodern

⁵⁰ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 238.

⁵¹ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 241.

Christian should unite all contexts of human life, inspired by the biblical truth and the example of Jesus who taught the Gospel to the people as whole beings.⁵²

Finally, Grenz understands that the proclamation of the Gospel in a postmodern context must also be expressed in order to assert that human existence is more than the mere accumulation of knowledge. In modern times, this was one of the most important concepts. However, the proclamation of the Gospel aims at obtaining knowledge and transforming lives. So, this has to be relevant to all aspects of life, not allowing people to live a Christian life between the extremes of activism and quietism. Therefore, this feature of the proclamation of the Gospel in a postmodern perspective helps humans to cope well with the true function of knowledge.⁵³

The second author about Preaching and Postmodernity is Graham Johnston. In *Preaching in Postmodernity* Johnston states, “The age of the preacher is gone, the age of communication has arrived.”⁵⁴ Considering this, we should think of ourselves, not only as preachers of the gospel, but also as communicators of the gospel, about which Johnston writes, “communicators are about the process of imparting information that involves both message and listener.”⁵⁵ There are strategies that preachers need to use in order to successfully communicate the truth of Scriptures to distracted and uninterested postmodern audiences. Preachers should not expect to connect without first understanding who their listeners are and how they think and choose. Preachers are also challenged to make the

⁵² Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 243.

⁵³ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 244.

⁵⁴ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 149.

⁵⁵ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 150.

effort and take the necessary risk to reach out to a different kind of churchgoer. At the same time, they must not surrender their expositional method by preaching culture rather than the message of the Bible. “Twenty-first century listeners may prefer idols but they lack a God large enough to sustain their lives in complicated times.”⁵⁶

For Graham Johnston, the communicator of the gospel should consider seven steps to achieve the objective which is that the listener and parishioner understand the message and see how to apply it in their life. First: take a dialogical approach, a Socratic dialogue of using question-and-answer as a method of engaging in a learning exercise. Second: use inductive preaching. The author writes that another way of dealing with the suspicions of the twenty-first century listener is to use inductive rather than deductive preaching. The deductive approach involves stating upfront the central or big idea as a declarative proposition, then proceeding to justify the claim. The inductive message postpones the declaration of the big idea to a point later in the sermon so that the listener has the opportunity to arrive mentally at the same conclusion. Inductive preaching involves the listener in learning and starts the message where people are. The third step indicated by Johnston is to use storytelling. As he puts it, “stories put us in touch with people on a level of shared humanity.”⁵⁷ Storytelling can grab the listener’s imagination and help people identify with an idea in a way that triggers significance and meaning. The fourth step to reach the postmodern listener is to use audiovisuals, drama and art. The fifth step is to use humor. Humor helps the listener to connect their attention to the preacher and the message.

⁵⁶ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 145.

⁵⁷ Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World*, 155.

The sixth step is to become a good listener. And, the seventh step is make the message delivery crisp and clear.

The third authors about Preaching and Postmodernity are Ronald Allen and Barbara Blaisdell. In the work *Theology for Preaching: Authority Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Day*, authors Ronald Allen, Barbara Blaisdell and Scott Johnston propose six modes of discourse for the sermon in the postmodern world.⁵⁸ They seek to answer the question: Are some modes of discourse better suited than others to a congregation in an increasingly postmodern setting? Homiletics has long been asking, How do people listen? That question should be preceded by a more important one, Who listens? While the authors focus on who is listening, they concentrate on the discussion of how the preacher should use language to cause the listener to really listen to what is being said. There are two functions of language: stenic and tensive.⁵⁹ Stenic language is propositional and informational. It communicates data with precision and typically appeals to the intellect. The great value of stenic language is that it can be very precise.⁶⁰ Stenic language allows philosophers, theologians, and preachers to state plainly what they believe. The second function of language is tensive. “Tensive language, as its name implies, embodies the tensions that are part of the life process.”⁶¹ Tensive language can reflect and create the tensions with which life is charged. The language that we use shapes our perception of the world. The preacher can use both stenic and tensive language. The preacher should ask,

⁵⁸ Ronald J Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 161.

⁵⁹ Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston, *Theology for Preaching*, 164.

⁶⁰ Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston, *Theology for Preaching*, 164.

⁶¹ Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston, *Theology for Preaching*, 165.

What type of language is the most communicative in a specific congregation? Some people are most comfortable with propositional preaching and have difficulty processing tensive language. They need the preacher to spell out the sermon's point and its application to life. Other listeners are impatient with stenic speech and are engaged by more imaginative modes of discourse. A lot of a people seem to respond to a combination of stenic and tensive language.

Ronald Allen states, "My observation from teaching preaching for thirteen years is that most preachers prefer inductive, imaginative homiletical styles. But, in response to critical reflection on the listening climate in the congregation, preachers may need to make a conscious effort to preach in modes beyond their preferences."⁶² Intellectual honesty with self-disclosure is another important tool to cause listeners to listen to what is being preached. "Preachers need to be honest about their own doubts, their own questions, their own struggles, their genuine affirmations, and the things they cannot affirm."⁶³ Being honest requires that we name our questions and fears. This helps the postmodern listener, who is more concerned with relationships and with who is speaking than with what is being said, to identify with some of the preacher's struggles and questions and to open up to listen to their thoughts and message.

The fourth and the last author about Preaching and Postmodernity is Jeffrey Arthurs. In *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, Dr. In "The Postmodern Mind and Preaching," Jeffrey Arthurs brings some advice to preachers in these postmodern days. His first advice is to patiently instruct the content of the message: "Patient instruction in the Truth is crucial

⁶² Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston, *Theology for Preaching*, 170.

⁶³ Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston, *Theology for Preaching*, 182.

since a postmodern audience is ‘agnostic’ lacking knowledge of God.”⁶⁴ The audience is composed of a diversity of listeners: people who constantly hear other voices and priorities, seekers, children, believers, doubters, and cultured despisers.

Arthurs argues that “the use of two-sided arguments, where the persuader shows knowledge of opposing viewpoints, is powerful with an audience jaded by media and skeptical of simplistic answers.”⁶⁵ His second advice is to break down walls with the form of our message. He suggests that the message should be personal, and by “personal” Arthurs means two things: conversational and disclosive. First, conversational is more like a coffeehouse where friends chat face-to-face and share stories. Postmodernists are socialized to value communication which is natural and modulated. And, being disclosive responds to the fact that today’s public communication is more intimate than it was in past generations. Arthurs suggests that “preachers should consider using self-disclosure in their sermons not only because audiences value it but also because the form helps communicate the theology of incarnation. Truth should never be merely abstract and propositional. It should be personal and operative.”⁶⁶ He also agrees that narrative sermons help postmodern listeners experience the message imaginatively and nonthreateningly. However, he says that “narrative is not the homiletical savior for postmoderns.”⁶⁷ His reason is that not only can stories be told poorly, just as the classic three points, but narrative sermons also can have

⁶⁴ Jeffrey D. Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 191.

⁶⁵ Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, 192.

⁶⁶ Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, 195.

⁶⁷ Arthurs, “The Postmodern Mind and Preaching,” in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, 196.

such a lack of clarity that they do not strongly communicate the central idea derived from a biblical text.

These are some of the most important works that deal with the theme of preaching in postmodernity with a focus on how the preacher can preach and present a sermon that is listened and understood by the postmodern listener. The literature review of this project's theme is now concluded. It covered the definitions of the postmodern phenomenon, postmodernity characteristics of ethos theory and the preaching in postmodernity. We will now move onto the project itself.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

This thesis-project deals with how preaching can address the problem of disregard for authority resulting from a postmodern culture. One of the challenges of this thesis is to help the postmodern listener to become more open to receive the message of the Bible. My research question is: how can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative postmodern world that claims, “We are our own authority?” My thesis is that even in an anti-authoritative age, when listeners feel that the speaker has high character they lower their skepticism, thus leading to effective persuasion in preaching. Chapter four is the heart of this thesis as I explain the process I used in seeking to verify my thesis statement. My project-design consisted of two different parts: first, a test with listeners and second, the articulation of principles to take advantage of ethos in preaching.

In the first part of the project, the test, the objective was to evaluate the impact that character has in preaching. I sought to find out if the character of the preacher is related to persuasion. That is, when listeners know and respect the character of the preacher, does this lower their skepticism, making them more open to persuasion? To verify my hypothesis about the importance of the preacher's ethos, specifically the consequences when the listeners accredit a high level of character to the preacher, I tested two groups of people. Both groups were heterogeneous and consisted of people between 18 and 40 years of age. The reason for this age range was to have participants most directly influenced by

postmodern culture, as explained in chapter three. All were members of the First Baptist Church of Penha (São Paulo, SP – Brazil), affiliated with the Brazilian Baptist Convention, where I have been senior pastor for the last three years. The test consisted of a sermon's manuscript evaluated by each participant. I informed the first group who the preacher was, but I did not inform the second group. I asked these two groups to assign a rate of 1 through 5 to indicate how trustworthy the sermon was for each one of them. As will be seen below, the answer to my question about the relationship of ethos and authority is found in the fact that when listeners knew and respected the character of the preacher they lowered their skepticism and were more open to being persuaded by the sermon.

In the second part, I articulated principles for how preachers can take advantage of ethos so that their sermons may be considered trustworthy, motivate people's attention, and stir a desire to listen. I also offer some advice on how the preacher can cultivate approved character and be recognized as trustworthy.

The Test

I will divide this first section in two parts. In part one I talk about the test and its participants, and in part two I make some observations about the results of the test.

Part one: I selected two groups of ten people each, groups A and B, and exposed them to a sermon preached by Dr. Russell Phillip Shedd. I asked both groups to read the entire sermon. –However, before and after I exposed them to the sermon, I tried to verify the level of their skepticism to see if the ethos of the preacher would make any difference in lowering their skepticism and increasing persuasion. Using a Likert scale I asked both

groups to evaluate four statements before and after the sermon.¹ These four statements are related to Shedd's sermon subject. The four statements are: 1) I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God; 2) I believe that God created the heavens and the earth; 3) I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible; 4) I believe that nature reveals that there is a Creator and that the Bible reveals who is the Creator of all things.

Dr. Russell Shedd (1929-2016), received his M.Div. from Wheaton College and a Ph.D. in New Testament from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Dr. Shedd was a member of the Conservative Baptist Mission in Southern Brazil and worked in Brazil for more than 50 years. He was a professor at the São Paulo Baptist Theological Seminary and was acclaimed in Brazil and abroad as a lecturer, speaking at conferences, churches, seminaries and theological colleges. He wrote several published works that are still used in Brazilian seminaries. Russell Shedd is still respected in Brazilian evangelical churches because he was very important for the growth and development of the evangelical church in the country.²

The two groups were exposed to the same portion of the sermon manuscript preached by Shedd. In group A I selected people who knew him, listened to his sermons, or read some of his books. It was not necessary to know him personally, but to know him at least through his sermons and books. The criteria to participate in group A was, "How well, 1-5, did you know Russell Shedd by his sermons or his books?" For group A I selected people who answered 4 or 5. This scale was presented in this way: 1, not at all; 2, only

¹ All the references to Likert scale will measure as it follows: 1, disagree strongly, 2, disagree, 3, neither agree nor disagree, 4, agree, 5, agree strongly.

² Full biographical details can be found in Appendix 1.

slightly; 3 somewhat; 4 well; 5 very well. After dividing my participants into two groups, I asked group A to go into a room and group B to go to another room. I introduced the process to group A by stating, “Here is the text of a sermon from our beloved Pr. Russell Shedd. I ask you to evaluate from 1 to 5 how trustworthy you think this sermon is.” To answer this question I used the Liekert scale. After group A answered the question, I asked them three more questions. First, to respond to the four statements again; second, “What positive quality do you highlight in the life of Russell Shedd?”; third, I asked them to rate these three statements: 1. I trust this speaker (rate your response, 1-5); 2. I believe that this speaker cares about me (rate 1-5); 3. I am persuaded to do what he says because I believe he has high character (rate 1-5). Again I used the Likert scale.

I introduced the test to group B by saying, “Here is a text of unknown authorship that is a sermon manuscript. I ask you to evaluate from 1 to 5 how trustworthy you think this sermon is.” After answering that question, I also asked the people from group B the same questions I asked group A. The only question I did not ask group B was about the quality of Dr. Russell Shedd because group B did not know who the author of the sermon was.

The sermon was based in Romans 1:18-20:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

Below is a summary of the sermon read by test participants.³

In the post-Christianity Western world, there is general skepticism about the divine inspiration of the Bible, the credibility of the miracles found in the Scriptures, the

³ The entire sermon can be found in Appendix 2.

origin of the universe, and the beginning of life in the Universe. They are objects of faith, and faith does not refer to absolute truth, but to a certainty that an individual accepts, many declare. Still less viable would be to try to defend Christian morality as an absolute for a post-Christian thinker.

On some topics, science does not dare to make a statement. The origin of the universe and life is one of them. There is no logical explanation for the Big Bang theory without considering the Creator of the matter or of the energy that was released in this incredible explosion. How was it detonated? If there is no intelligent nor rational cause to explain the coherence of the universe, we fall into the absurd.

Francis Collins was director of the Human Genome Project and one of those responsible for a spectacular achievement in modern science: the mapping of human DNA in 2001. Collins states: "Faith is reason plus revelation, and the part of revelation requires a person to think with the spirit as well as with the mind. I have discovered that there is a wonderful harmony in the complementary truths of science and faith. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found both in the church and in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and tremendous creation, science can in fact be a means of worship."

Explaining the rationality of the universe without an infinitely intelligent Being seems totally impossible, therefore, absurd. We may remember what Augustine of Hippo said, "I believe to understand, and I understand to believe better."

The apostle Paul begins verse 18 of the first chapter of Romans with the words, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven." His anger manifests itself because we do not think about where the intelligence that created the universe came from. He is angry because we suppress the truth of our hearts. He is furious because we ignore the natural revelation of His power. God is angry because our knowledge increases, but we are less and less attentive to the Creator. We are inexcusable because the preaching of God is everywhere and we ignore it.

Creation is a herald of the creator. Creation with its multifaceted beauty is an eloquent message from the creator. The universe did not arise spontaneously. It is not the product of a cosmic explosion or an evolution of millions and millions of years. With the progress of science, we are even more delighted with the greatness of creation and with the majesty of the creator. Stellar worlds, billions of galaxies, with their almost indescribable complexity, it all points to the omnipotence of the creator. Both the macrocosm and the microcosm stamp the creator's fingerprints. Due to this stupendous work of creation, men are inexcusable before the Creator.

May we say together with the psalmist David: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1).

Having explained my methodology, I will now discuss my observations and conclusions of the test.

Observations and Conclusions of the Test

I will divide this second part, observations and conclusions of the test, into three sections. First: observations of the results of the test performed with group A; second: observations of the test performed with group B; and, third: observations of the results of group A and B combined.

Part One: Group A had information of who the preacher was. There were ten completed tests in all. The first four statements in the test sought to know and evaluate the level of skepticism present in the participants, as I will show below in the table 2. For the first statement, "I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God," all ten participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree. For the second statement, "I believe that God created the heavens and the earth," all ten participants again answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree. For the third statement, "I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible," five participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree; four respondents answered with a rate of 4, agree; and one participant replied with a rate of 2, disagree. For the fourth statement, "I believe that nature reveals that there is a Creator and the Bible reveals who is the Creator of all things," all responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree.

Table 2. Questions 1-4 of group A	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1. I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q2. I believe that God created the heavens and the earth	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q3. I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible	0%	10%	0%	40%	50%
Q4. I believe that nature reveals that there is a Creator and that the Bible reveals who is the Creator of all things.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

I asked them to read the sermon manuscript preached by Dr. Russell Shedd. After reading I asked them to answer one question and evaluate three statements. In answer to the question, “How trustworthy do you think this sermon is?” the response of the ten participants was a rate of 5. They fully agreed with what had been preached by Dr. Shedd. For the three statements, the answers were as follows: for “I trust this speaker,” nine answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree, and one participant responded with a rate of 4, agree. For the second statement, “I believe that this speaker cares about me,” six participants answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, and two responded with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree. For the third statement, “I am persuaded to do what he says because I believe he has high character,” five participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, and two responded with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree. The answers are in the table 3 below.

Table 3. Questions 6-9 of group A	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q6. How trustworthy you think this sermon is	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q7. I trust this speaker	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Q8. I believe that this speaker cares about me	0%	0%	20%	20%	60%
Q9. I am persuaded to do what he says because I believe he has high character	0%	0%	22%	22%	56%

After these answers, I asked one more question, “What positive quality do you highlight in the life of Russell Shedd?” These answers varied, “Integrity; commitment to God; to be an eternal Bible scholar; tries to explain plain biblical truths; dedicated, didactic, man of faith and Christian character, loving towards preaching the gospel; consistency between life and preaching; dedication to study and love of the teaching ministry; empathy; extracting truths from the biblical texts; clarity in his ideas.”

I finished the test by asking if in light of the first four statements anyone wanted to change any answer. There were changes only in the statement “I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible.” One participant changed the rating from 2, disagree, to a rate of 4 agree, and two participants switched from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. The rest maintained their prior answers. It is interesting to note that the average time of completion of the test by the participants was three minutes. I thanked everyone for their participation in the test.

Second part: group B. This group did not know who had been the author of the text and the preacher of the sermon. I said he was anonymous. I asked them to evaluate the first four statements from 1 to 5. For the first statement, “I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God,” nine of the respondents responded with a rate of 5, strongly

agree; and one participant entered a rate of 4, agree. For the second statement, “I believe that God created the heavens and the earth,” the answers of the ten participants was also with a rate of 5, strongly agree. For the third statement, “I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible,” four responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, five responded with a rate of 4, agree, and one participant entered a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree. For the fourth statement, “I believe that nature reveals that there is a Creator and the Bible reveals who is the Creator of all things” all responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree. The answers of the group B are below in table 4

Table 4. Questions 1-4 of group B	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q1. I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Q2. I believe that God created the heavens and the earth	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q3. I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible	0%	0%	10%	50%	40%
Q4. I believe that nature reveals that there is a Creator and that the Bible reveals who is the Creator of all things.	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%

I asked them to read the sermon manuscript. After that, I asked them to also answer one question and evaluate three statements as we see in table 5. In answer to the question “How trustworthy do you think this is?” six participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, one replied with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, and one participant replied with a rate of 2, disagree. For the following three statements, the answers were as follows: “I trust this speaker,” six answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, and two responded with a

rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree. For the second statement, “I believe that this speaker cares about me,” seven answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree, one replied with a rate of 4, agree, one replied with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, and one replied with a rate of 2, disagree. For the third statement, “I am persuaded to do what he says because I believe he has high character,” five participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, one replied with a rate of 4, agree, two responded with a rate of 3 neither agree nor disagree, and two responded with a rate of 2, disagree.

Table 5. Questions 6-9 of group B	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q6. How trustworthy you think this sermon is	0%	10%	10%	20%	60%
Q7. I trust this speaker	0%	0%	20%	20%	60%
Q8. I believe that this speaker cares about me	0%	10%	10%	10%	70%
Q9. I am persuaded to do what he says because I believe he has high character	0%	20%	20%	10%	50%

I finished the test for group B by asking if someone, in light of the first four statements, would like to change any of their answers. Three participants changed their response to the statement, “I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible,” from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree, and one participant went from a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. About the statement, “I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God” one participant went from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. It is also interesting to note that the average

time of completion of the test by each of the participants was ten minutes. I thanked everyone for their participation in the test.

Third part: observations. I will make four observations about the test results. The first observation deals with the average time of test completion by each of the groups. For group A, comprised of those who knew that the preacher was Dr. Shedd, the mean time was 3 minutes. For group B, those who did not know who the preacher was, the average time was 10 minutes. The attention and concentration that group B needed to dispense was much greater than group A. Those who knew who the preacher was, ran the test faster and under less strain. Those who did not know the preacher had to spend more time reading the text. When we know and respect the preacher our attention and critical analysis is reduced and we become more receptive to what is being said. The fact of those who used less time to read Shedd's sermon, this gives base to think that they also used a lower level of attention and critical analysis of what they were reading. They read faster. This credibility and confidence of the preacher can be both positive, more open to what he says, as well as negative: since I trust the preacher, I will reduce my critical analysis of what he speaks and accept all things he says as true.

Second observation: answers to the question "how trustworthy do you think this sermon is?" While all in group A responded with the maximum rate of 5, in group B there were divergences. Six participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, one replied with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, and one participant replied with a rate of 2, disagree. It was much more divided. When we know who the preacher is and trust him, we also trust his preaching. When we do not know the preacher, I infer from the answers given by group B that it is more difficult to attribute reliability to the preaching. This also applies to the statement "I trust this speaker." In group

A nine answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree and one participant responded with a rate of 4, agree. In group B, six answered with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, and two responded with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree.

Third observation: response changes in the four final statements. In group A there were response changes in only one statement (“I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible”), and all ten participants responded with a maximum rate of 5 to the other statements. In the statement quoted above, one participant moved from a rate of 2, disagree, to a rate of 4, agree, and two participants passed from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. These participants were persuaded by the sermon and modified their responses. In group B, the changes were larger because the responses to the first four initial statements were more divergent than those from group A. Three participants changed their response to the statement “I believe the Bible confirms science and science confirms the Bible” from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. About the same statement, one participant went from a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. And about the statement “I believe the Bible is the inerrant and infallible word of God,” one participant went from a rate of 4, agree, to a rate of 5, strongly agree. Based on the response changes in group B we can state that, although they did not know who the preacher was and having become quite divided in the answer of how trustworthy the sermon was, persuasion occurred. Although group B did not know the author of the sermon, there was some persuasion through the content of the sermon, as we can see, they changed the responses of the last four statements, in comparison of the first four questions.

Fourth observation: both groups affirmed important doctrines such as the inerrancy of the Bible and that God created heaven and Earth. However, only group A, who knew who the preacher was, one hundred percent strongly agreed and believed that the

sermon was 100% trustworthy. This leaves us with the idea that although we have our doctrines well established when we listen a sermon by a preacher, having a high ethos of the preacher for ourselves; we will be more open and receptive to what is being said. The ethos of the messenger helps the listeners with be more open to the message. This helps us to prove the main hypothesis of this thesis: when listeners believe or are convinced that the speaker has high character they lower their skepticism, thus leading to effective persuasion in preaching.

I will now turn to the last section of this paper where I will present principles to take advantage of ethos in Preaching.

Principles to Take Advantage of Ethos in Preaching

After the observations and conclusions of the test performed, I highlight three principles for preachers to take advantage of ethos to an audience of postmodern listeners. These three principles are authority, character, and communication.

First, the principle of authority. Participants of the test pointed out that one of the strongest qualities of Dr. Russel Shedd was that he preached the Bible. This was his main subject. He was an expositor of the Scriptures. The Bible was his supreme authority. The Bible must be our supreme authority. We may ask ourselves, “In light of the postmodern scenario presented throughout this thesis, is there a future for preaching?” We can answer yes, based on what the Apostle Paul says when writing to the church in Corinth, “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”⁴ There is

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:21

a future for preaching, for God has planned to save people through the folly of preaching. The Word of God is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes”⁵ It is about the Word that the preacher must speak and communicate for it is the saving power of God. Although group B did not know who the preacher was, they were clearly persuaded by the biblical content of the sermon to change some of their answers to the statements they had made before they read the sermon. The Bible has the power to inform us and to form us. It is enough. It is alive and effective. Preaching is a fundamental part of the process of people’s salvation. “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”⁶ There must be a preacher. What, then, should be the content of the message? In face of the challenges of our postmodern world, such as skepticism and relativism, we need to affirm that the authority of the preacher rests first in the Bible. Authority is “that reality on which confidence and responsible decision turn. It is a point of reference, the locus of credibility which gives direction and abiding character to human life.”⁷ The Bible is the Word of God that promotes change and transformation.

If the Bible is the authority of the preaching, we can think here: What factors determine whether a message is biblical? Is it enough to contain and include biblical quotations or to be based on a biblical text or passage? Recalling Haddon Robinson’s definition about expository preaching: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and

⁵ Romans 1:16

⁶ Romans 10:14

⁷ Allen, Ronald J, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 35.

literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.”⁸ Being faithful to the context is key. Preachers must be faithful to the context in a historical, grammatical and literary way. Applying Robinson’s definition in our study and preaching is essential to consider a sermon biblical.

Second, the principle of character. Character defines our preaching. People who took the test pointed out that among Dr. Russell Shedd’s qualities, which helped them to pay attention to the sermon, the strongest one was his character. As we saw above, there were many answers that pointed to the qualities of his integrity and character. He lived in a manner that was consistent with his words. In light of the statements made by the participants, we recall what the Apostle Paul wrote to young Timothy about the qualifications and requirements of those who desire pastoral ministry. These are the words of the Apostle Paul to young Timothy:

Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders.⁹

We can understand and extend all of these qualifications outlined above by the Apostle Paul regarding the requirements for the episcopate, as well as qualifications and requirements for someone who wishes to be a preacher of the Word of God. Since group A

⁸ Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: MI, Baker Academic, 2014), 25.

⁹ 1 Timothy 3:1-8

knew Dr. Shedd it was unanimous on the question: “how trustworthy do you think this sermon is?” by responding with the top rate of 5. In group B there were minor differences, perhaps because they did not know who the preacher was. Therefore, starting from Paul's recommendations to Timothy, we can summarize the Apostle's recommendations in two major areas that are related with what participants pointed as qualities of Dr. Russell Shedd.

The first area of character that participants pointed out about Dr. Russel Shedd is the area of personal reputation. One of the participants mentioned that Shedd’s family had a famous quote: I only believe that Russell is a sinner because the Bible says so. Shedd was actually one person who was above reproach. Two virtues are mentioned here by Apostle Paul, according to 1 Timothy. The first virtue is to be blameless. “Now the overseer is to be above reproach”¹⁰ This quality can be considered a kind of heading or title for all other points cited and listed by Paul. The list of virtues begins with an all-encompassing requirement.

In Greek it is *anepilemtos*, which literally means “not taking advantage of,” hence “blameless” or “fearless.” Critics and accusers should not find vulnerable points in the preacher to confirm a personal attack. As John Stott puts it, “This does not mean being immune to mistakes, for then there would not be a single son of Adam that would qualify. This has to do with conduct that can be observed as impeccable.” The preacher must have a character that inspires confidence. To be blameless is to present no obvious defect of character or conduct in your past or present life that one may exploit to discredit him, thereby discrediting the message through him. The second virtue about the preacher’s personal reputation is “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will

¹⁰ 1 Timothy 3:2

not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.”¹¹ Our testimony overflows beyond the boundaries of the church. With the expression “outsiders”, Paul is referring to the non-Christian public. Paul wants Timothy to remember that the world is watching him, so he must be wise in his behavior in order to earn respect from the outsiders as well. Paul is directing Timothy to maintain his ethos, his character, impeccable to outsiders so that this is not a hindrance to preaching, exactly what we have dealt with in this work and one of the outstanding qualities of Dr. Shedd, recognized by those who participated in the tests.

The second are about character is teaching: “able to teach”¹² This is the only professional qualification mentioned along with all other moral qualifications. Pastors are mainly teachers or masters. John Stott states, “What distinguishes a pastoral Christian ministry is to have in it the pre-eminence of the Word of God.”¹³ This was an important quality about Dr. Shedd, highlighted by those who took the test: one who was dedicated to study and to excellence in preaching. It takes skill to teach. We can remember the words of the Apostle Paul to Titus “hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”¹⁴ Teaching should be based on sound doctrine in harmony with the teaching of the apostles, as found in the Bible. This doctrine is called sound because it not only builds faith and encourages others, but also protects against the corrupting influence of false teachers. Building upon this point about preaching we will go onto the third and last principle, which we can also observe in the preaching of Dr. Russell Shedd.

¹¹ 1 Timothy 3:7

¹² 1 Timothy 3:2

¹³ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 95.

¹⁴ Titus 1:9

Third principle: communication. I will divide communication in two parts. First: managing current issues by seeking answers in the Bible was highlighted by those who took the test as one of Dr. Shedd's qualities. The recommendation here is: do not underestimate the 21st-century listeners. They can check, in seconds, if the preacher is correct or not. Also, expect a variety of perspectives from the listeners. As Graham Johnston reminds us, "You can no longer assume, for example, that your regular church listeners subscribe to a Christian worldview."¹⁵ Preachers have to know that the parishioners can include individualists, skeptics, consumerists, etc. because they are influenced by 21st century thought. We need to know our day's culture. One method that can help preachers knowing the culture is the invisible congregation technique suggested by Haddon Robinson. The technique consists of bringing to mind six or seven specific people from our congregation during the preaching of the sermon. For example, it could be a teenager with problems with his parents, a man trying to overcome his bad habits, a young man with sincere doubts about his faith, a divorced mother, a couple planning to divorce, a man in a middle age crisis. A group like this will help us trying to understand and know the culture in which listeners live, and their questions and struggles. While they listen to the sermon, they are thinking: What does it mean? Is it true? As Scott Black Johnston, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, states "Preaching that is not touched by the doubts and questions of secular experience is not compelling. It loses touch with reality."¹⁶ The preaching task in a postmodern context

¹⁵ Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 2001), 14.

¹⁶ Ronald J Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth, and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 181.

demands that the preacher have a rigorous conversation between her or his own questions and the questions of community. The sermon preached by Dr. Shedd touched in the questions of post-Christianity Western world, such as skepticism about the divine inspiration of the Bible, the credibility of the miracles found in the Scriptures, the origin of the universe, and the beginning of life in the Universe. Never has so much information been produced as it is in our days, and we have never had so much access to as much information as we do today. The technological age with the internet in the palm of our hands enables us to do so. We cannot, as preachers, underestimate our congregation or postmodern listeners. We need to address the issues with which they are struggling daily and do so with frankness, honesty, and empathy for those who suffer.

The second part of the communication principle that I highlight is related to communication skills. When addressing postmodern listeners, who seek more personal communication, preachers should be more conversational using language that people speak daily. Sometimes preachers may think that by using formal and academic language with concepts and words that people do not understand they will be more respected. We communicate in so many ways. Even with our physical appearance, the choice of dress code and non-verbal language, we need to embody the message. The incarnation of God should be for preachers the ultimate example that we need to leave our “homiletical thrones” and be closer to people in language, style and even in our choice of clothing. Using personal stories, sharing personal experiences and personal struggles, employing current and daily language, pausing between words, thoughts and sentences, being aware of the power of facial and body expressions, should all be goals for preachers who want to be more personal and conversational.

The final chapter will summarize and write my final considerations answering these three questions: How will these outcomes affect your ministry? Where will this take us? What else needs to be done?

CHAPTER FIVE

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this final chapter of my thesis-project, I will summarize my findings and write my final considerations answering these three questions, “How will these outcomes affect your ministry? Where will this take us? What else needs to be done?”

The first question I will address is “How will these outcomes affect your ministry?” I will divide this question into two aspects. The first effect that the results of this research have on my life and ministry, as a preacher of the Word of God, is bringing me to a realization that the most important part in preparing a sermon is not the sermon itself, but the life of the preacher. As perceived by his listeners, the preacher's life will help them hear or reject the message. A preacher is much more than his or her sermon. The words of a sermon carry and convey the strength and authority of the preacher. Preaching is not just what happens within the thirty or forty minutes of a worship service; it is the product of a lifetime. Although I have known this simple truth for a long time, since I became a pastor with the responsibility of preaching two to three times per week, I had been much more concerned with sermon techniques and with having it ready in a timely manner than with preparing my heart and my life to convey the Word of God. I have now come to believe that the most important part of a sermon is the life of the one who is preaching.

I sought to prove throughout this thesis-project that when the preacher has a high ethos before his listeners, they lower their skepticism and become more open and receptive to the message. Some observations regarding the participants’ responses to the performed test led me to believe that the hypothesis of this thesis-project was confirmed. As the test

demonstrated, the average reading time used by those who knew that the sermon text was written by Dr. Russell Shedd was 3 minutes and they agreed one hundred percent that the text was trustworthy, whereas the group who did not know who the author was took an average of 10 minutes and only six out of ten participants strongly agreed that the text was trustworthy. Those who knew that the preacher was Dr. Shedd needed less time to read the sermon. This fact raises a couple of possible explanations. The first one is that trusting the preacher made readers need less time. A second explanation could be that the shorter time was due to a disinterested reading. However, the data and information that lead me to believe that the time difference occurred because of the reader's trust in the preacher is in some other answers of group A, as we see in the next paragraph.

The groups' answers to the question "How trustworthy do you think this sermon is?" offer more proof to the hypothesis that when listeners ascribe a high ethos to the preacher they lessen their skepticism and become more open to the message. While all in group A, who knew that Dr. Shedd was the preacher responded with the maximum rate of 5, in group B there were divergences. Six participants responded with a rate of 5, strongly agree, two responded with a rate of 4, agree, one replied with a rate of 3, neither agree nor disagree, and one participant replied with a rate of 2, disagree. It was much more divided, as demonstrated in table 6.

Table 6. Question 6 group A and B	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q6. How trustworthy do you think this sermon is – Group A	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Q6. How trustworthy do you think this sermon is – Group B	0%	10%	10%	20%	60%

When we know who the preacher is and trust him, we also trust his preaching.

When we do not know the preacher, I infer from the answers given by group B that it is more difficult to attribute credibility to the preaching. This also applies to the statement “I trust this speaker,” as demonstrated in table 7. In group A nine answered with a rate of 5 and one participant responded with a rate of 4. In group B, six answered with a rate of 5, two responded with a rate of 4, and two responded with a rate of 3.

Table 7. Question 7 group A and B	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Q7. I trust this speaker – Group A	0%	0%	0%	10%	90%
Q7. I trust this speaker – Group B	0%	0%	20%	20%	60%

People evaluate our content through our lives. Who we are will speak louder than the words we speak. This should lead us to an increased awareness of our immense responsibility both for the way we live as preachers of the Word of God, seeking to be excellent witnesses to those within and outside the church, and also for what we speak, that is, the content we present. As preachers we should not use the credibility that is assigned to us by the hearers to make a speech for our own benefit. We should be motivated to expose the whole truth of God’s Word and never use this channel of credibility for our own vanity or self-interest.

The second aspect of how the results of this thesis-project will affect my life and ministry is the learning of how to develop a good ethos before the listeners. Here I will highlight three steps to develop a good ethos. The first step is the establishment of credibility. Our credibility as preachers grows out of two sources: expertise and

relationships. Credibility as it relates to expertise is based on our competence as preachers. If listeners feel that the speaker is competent, intelligent, alert, accurate, qualified, they will assign the preacher credibility and will be inclined to respond to the message. If preachers have a history of being well informed, and theologically and doctrinally consistent, listeners will trust their expertise. A reputation as serious and committed students with excellence in the preaching of the Word of God is central to the question of expertise. In addition, preachers need to be aware that, in seconds, listeners can check on their smartphones and computers the information shared in the sermon such as historical data, statistics, and quotations from important people. Expertise is a personal history of not distorting the facts. The accuracy of our information helps to build credibility. The need for accuracy of shared information is particularly acute with a critical or skeptical audience. Listeners can focus on minor errors as a reason not to pay attention to the rest of what we have to say.

On the issue of competency, let's revisit what the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress."¹ I highlight the word progress: everyone must see the progress of our ministry in preaching. I believe that overtime a preaching ministry goes through different stages, in terms of competency. Through a long period, as we seek growth in our communication skills, we develop our competence, our expertise through study, perseverance, practice and patience. It is a natural result then that, as we seek to grow in our competence as preachers, our progress becomes noticeable to our listeners.

¹ 1 Timothy 4:14-15

Credibility in our relationships is the authority preachers obtain by the way they relate to people. To preachers, perhaps no factor contributes more to legitimate authority and credibility than an authentic Christian character demonstrated by how they relate to people. One advantage of a prolonged ministry in one local church is that the preacher has a better chance of developing this, resulting in credibility for what is preached, precisely because of the relationships developed. Ethos comes from a minister's authentic care for people and how he expresses his ministry: to pray for the people, to remember individuals' names, to care for people in times of crisis. If preachers demonstrate that they can work in the best spiritual interest of others and have personal proof and evidence that they have genuine interest for the people, then listeners and parishioners will trust their sermons. The other side of the issue of preaching to people who know our lives is when there are things that can tarnish our reputation. Precisely because they have known a preacher for a long time and know of many of the preacher's imperfections, some listeners may close up and become extremely skeptical of the message.

The second step in developing a good ethos is to be connected with listeners by common subjects and themes. The sermon should start where people are by engaging them with the practical issues of their daily lives. This means that preachers should bring to the sermon not only the grammatical, historical and literary issues of the biblical passage, but also bring the lives of the listeners to the biblical passage. We should help people visualize themselves in our sermons and in the biblical passages. Listeners should not have the impression that preachers live in a world that is different and far away from theirs. When the sermon addresses real dilemmas of human life it helps listeners understand that the preacher is interested in helping them deal with their issues.

The sample sermon that we used from Dr. Shedd addressed current issues such as the dialogue between faith and science and the belief that the Word of God is inerrant and infallible. We, as preachers, should answer the questions that the culture is asking. The questions that our listeners are grappling with are a consequence of living in their culture. Preachers should be good listeners of the needs and problems that their congregation is facing and managing. The invisible congregation technique suggested by Haddon Robinson can help us find the questions that people are asking.² The technique consists of bringing to mind six or seven specific people from our congregation during the preaching of the sermon. For example, it could be a teenager with problems with his parents, a man trying to overcome his bad habits, a young man with sincere doubts about his faith, a divorced mother, a couple planning to divorce, a man in a middle age crisis. A group like this will help us find the questions they are debating so that preaching is relevant to their lives.

The third step to develop a good ethos is to connect with the congregation by sharing personal stories. Although this technique was not used by Dr. Shedd self-disclosure appears in some excellent homiletic books that I reviewed in chapter three such as ones written by Timothy Keller, Jeffrey Arthurs, and Graham Johnston. Self-disclosure in preaching refers to those elements within the sermon in style and substance that disclose the personhood of the preacher and that selectively incorporate the preacher's life experiences with personal stories, anecdotes, and testimonies, for the purpose of elucidating the gospel. Personal stories help break down barriers that may exist between the listeners and the preacher and help one identify with the other.

² Haddon Robinson, "What Authority Do We Have Anymore?", in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig B. Larson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 258.

My second question for this chapter is, “Where will this take us?” To answer this question, I will make two observations. The first is in relation to the personal life of the preacher and the second is about the study of homiletics. First, as a preacher, I think that this research leads us in understanding that the best way to develop an ethos that helps people to hear the message is a life of dependence on the Holy Spirit of God. Since one of the factors that will enhance people’s receptivity to the sermon is the life of the preacher, it is fundamental for the preacher to depend on the Holy Spirit. How does this dependency show itself in a practical way? I believe it happens in two ways.

The first way is through the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit as seen in Galatians 5:22-23—love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. These marks of the Holy Spirit in our lives will help us, as we saw in the comments about Dr. Shedd’s life from the test participants, to have a good ethos that will help listeners to be more receptive to the sermons we preach. We will know that we are depending on the Holy Spirit of God if the fruit of the Spirit is seen in us by those who live with us.

The second way is found in Ephesians: “Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”³ Soon after the Apostle Paul’s statement about us letting ourselves be filled with the Holy Spirit, he mentions relationships. This sequence is significant. I think this is something intentional on the part of the apostle, for our way of relating to one another is a sign of whether or not we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

³ Ephesians 5:18-20

Relationships transformed a grateful heart are signs that the person is filled with the Holy Spirit of God. How does one develop dependence? Dependence of God is developed in a daily walk with God through prayer, study and practice of the Word of God, refuse to worry, and a life that seeks the kingdom of God in the first place in every decision practicing the more of Him and less of me principle. In fact, we depend on God for everything and in everything. Our dependence of God is demonstrated not only by doing things, but also by living a life that is submitted to the Lord. Dependence on God is not something we muster only in emergencies; it is the realization that apart from God's will we cannot presume even our next breath. Dependence sees God as being the source of everything. Dependence on God is the daily affirmation that without God we cannot do anything as Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing."⁴ Dependence on God means to to remain in him.

Now to a second observation, in the field of homiletics, addressing the question "Where will this take us?" The same research conducted in this thesis-project with a heterogeneous group of participants, could be performed with a more homogeneous group dividing them within the generational categories within the same church: adolescents, youth, adults, senior citizens, and even by gender. This study could result in a new depth and greater understanding of how the ethos of a preacher is formed, by seeing the results from different generational groups within the same church. A preacher may have a good ethos with teenagers, but not necessarily with church members over 60, for example. A preacher may have a good ethos in front of a female audience, but not in front of a male

⁴ John 15:5

audience. Understanding which components differ between different generations would be very interesting, in order to better understand how ethos forms in our listeners.

Also, it would be quite interesting to see and observe which components of ethos are relevant to one culture and not to another, with a study done in different countries or ethnic churches within the same country. Perhaps in an Eastern culture an older preacher is well received by a church congregation. However, in the context of South America, Brazil, for example, an elderly preacher can be perceived as boring and decontextualized. Understanding these differences would be very interesting.

Lastly, I will address the third question, “What else needs to be done?” This thesis-project did not cover or explore all points concerning the preacher’s ethos and its effects on the way people hear the message. A more in-depth study of the various components of ethos, such as having an attractive appearance, needs to be done, since this work focused only on the question of the preacher’s character. Here are some questions that could be explored by follow-up studies: Is a more attractive preacher in appearance better received by a congregation? Does our personal appearance have any relevance? Does the outfit of a preacher make any difference in the receptivity of the hearers? Is there a dress code for a preacher and does it vary from audience to audience?

One interesting example from business was a study conducted by the North American Harris Agency. For the survey, 514 human resource directors of large corporations were heard, and most of them said that they analyze how the professional behaves and the clothes they wear during a selection process for the vacancy of a senior executive. Approximately 90% of the participants said that the candidates’ look is the main aspect that forms the first opinion on them. This is because, according to the interviewees, well-groomed people raise more confidence than those who simply do not care about how

they present themselves. In addition, more than 50% of respondents said that they have the impression that the candidate is not very interested in the position when he goes to the interview dressed inappropriately. And, when asked about the importance of a candidate's competencies versus their appearance, the respondents were categorical in replying: "In selective processes for high-ranking posts there are always good candidates, so ideally they combine expertise with an appropriate look."⁵ Sunukjian says, "Experimenters have determined that speakers communicate competency and gain credibility by means of an attractive appearance, a fluent delivery, an organized message, and an evident awareness of human events."⁶ This study about personal appearance would be a very interesting study even more so if we compared the results in different cultures.

Another interesting point to be researched within the theme of the preacher's ethos would be the relationship between the preacher's self-image with the image that people form of him. The idea here would be that when we have a fixed idea about ourselves, whether positive or negative, we begin to behave according to that self-image and the people who live with us, also come to see us in this same way. It would be similar to what we see happening with the twelve spies of Israel as they bring their report to the people, after fulfilling the mission designated by Moses to survey the Promised Land. Ten of the twelve spies came back with a negative report regarding the Promised Land and stated before the people: "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the

⁵ Research points to the importance of appearance for professional success, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://cio.com.br/pesquisa-aponta-a-importancia-da-aparencia-para-o-sucesso-profissional>

⁶ Sunukjian, Donald. *The Credibility of the Preacher*, Bibliotheca Sacra (July, 1982), 256.

Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.”⁷ That which we are in our own eyes, is perceived by others in the same way.

Conclusion

Here I conclude my thesis-project: a homiletical response to the challenges for the authority of preaching in our postmodern world. My research question was, “How can we preach authoritative messages in an anti-authoritative postmodern world that claims, ‘We are our own authority’?” My thesis was that even in an anti-authoritative age, when listeners feel that the speaker has high character, they lower their skepticism, thus leading to effective persuasion in preaching. My prayer is that this work may bless the lives of preachers who seek a character approved by the Lord, just as the apostle Paul did, so that: “after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”⁸ May we follow Paul’s instruction to young pastor Timothy: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”⁹

⁷ Numbers 13:33

⁸ 1 Corinthians 9:27

⁹ 2 Timothy 2:15

APPENDIX A

Russell Philip Shedd Biography

Russell Philip Shedd was born November 10, 1929, in Aiquile, Bolivia, the son of Leslie Martin (1895-1979) and Della Johnston (1894-1959) workers for the Bolivian Indian Mission. His father was a native of Massachusetts and his mother was from North Carolina. Russell Shedd was almost five before he saw the United States during his parents' furlough in 1934-35. Russell Shedd graduated from Wheaton Academy in 1946. That same year he entered Wheaton College and earned a B.A. in 1949 and an M.A. in 1951. He received a B.D. degree from Faith Theological Seminary (Elkins Park, PA) in 1953 and a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh in 1955. He was ordained in 1953 at the Hydewood Park Baptist Church, North Plainfield, New Jersey. During 1955-56, Shedd taught at Southeastern Bible College in Alabama, where he met his wife Patricia Dunn, a native of Birmingham, Alabama. They were married June 22, 1957, following her graduation from Southeastern.

Russell Shedd served the Hydewood Park Baptist Church as interim pastor, 1956-57, and was accepted in 1958 by the Conservative Baptist Foreign Mission Society (CBFMS); he was appointed to the faculty of Leiria Seminary in Portugal. Delays in receipt of visas to enter Portugal forced their remaining in the United States until 1959, during which time Shedd helped found a church in a fast-growing suburb on Long Island. The Shedd also lived in Mississippi for a time during this period. In 1959 the Shedd and their infant son sailed for Portugal where Russell joined the Leiria Seminary faculty. At the same time he became involved in a publishing ministry. In 1962, the publishing house was transferred to Brazil. Edições Vida Nova of which Shedd was president, was operated by a

primarily Brazilian staff, with input from CBFMS and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. It concentrated on producing books designed to train, teach, and nurture Christians in order to infuse biblical scholarship into the Brazilian church. In 1977 it published an important annotated topical reference Bible for use by pastors and lay-workers. They made their permanent home in São Paulo, Brazil, where Russell headed the Bible Department of Faculdade Teológica Batista de São Paulo and pastored the Metropolitan Chapel, which he founded in 1977. He died in November 2016 in São Paulo, Brazil of complications from cancer.

APPENDIX B

Russell Philip Shedd Sermon Manuscript

Title: Knowledge and Revelation

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, 19 since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. 20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”¹

The race for knowledge has never been so intense in the history of mankind. At what time were so many students enrolled in universities? When was there so much money invested in research? It seems ironic that, coinciding with the fierce search for knowledge, the premise of postmodernity arises that there is no absolute truth.

In the post-Christianity Western world, there is general skepticism about the divine inspiration of the Bible, the credibility of the miracles found in the Scriptures, the origin of the universe, as well about the life in the world. They are objects of faith, and faith does not refer to absolute truth, but to a certainty that an individual accepts, many affirm. Still less viable would be to try to defend Christian morality as absolute for a post-Christian thinker.

On some topics, science does not dare to pronounce. One of them would be the origin of the universe and of life. There is no logical explanation for the Big Bang theory

¹ Romans 1:18-20

without mentioning the Creator of the matter or energy that was released in this incredible explosion. How was it detonated? If there is no intelligent and rational Cause to explain the coherence of the universe, we fall into the absurd.

Science for Einstein depends on religion to obtain faith in the Universe understandable, and its religiosity depends on science for the discovery of the admirable order of the Universe. For this reason, Einstein said the famous phrase “Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.”

Francis Collins was director of the Human Genome Project and one of those responsible for a spectacular achievement in modern science: the mapping of human DNA in 2001. Collins is the author of the bestselling *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* states: I had to admit that the science I loved was powerless to answer such questions as: What is the meaning of life? Why am I here? Why does math work, anyway? If the universe had a beginning, who created it? Why are the physical constants in the universe so tightly tuned to allow the possibility of complex life forms? Why do humans have a moral sense? What happens after we die? Faith is reason plus revelation, and the part of revelation requires a person to think with the spirit as well as with the mind. I have discovered that there is a wonderful harmony in the complementary truths of science and faith. The God of the Bible is also the God of the genome. God can be found both in the church and in the laboratory. By investigating God's majestic and tremendous creation, science can in fact be a means of worship.”

Explaining the rationality of the universe without an infinitely intelligent Being seems totally impossible, therefore, absurd. We may remember what Augustine of Hippo said, “I believe to understand, and I understand to believe better.”

Biblical revelation explains that man did not arise from a process of interaction of atoms without any purpose, but was designed by God, an infinite God in all its qualities. He created man to be free, to choose between right and wrong. If there were no connection between man and the Creator, there would hardly be a sense of responsibility and justice. And where would love come from? Being created by such a Being, it is reasonable to conclude that human self-consciousness, the responsibility and the pain of guilt, all come from the creative hand of God.

Here are some conclusions drawn from a conviction that the universe began and is maintained by an all-powerful, intelligent, and just Being.

1. Every scientific quest and conclusion depends on a rational and non-capricious and random universe. The laws of cause and effect work like all laws, that is, on a regular basis. There is order and logic.
2. We live in an intelligent universe. It can be studied and understood. There is a correspondence between the mind that strives to learn and any kind of knowledge.
3. It is a universe in which there is responsibility. Those who disobey the laws of cause and effect in the material world will suffer the consequences. The right is rewarded while the wrong can expect unavoidable punishment, even if the sinner lives quietly until death.
4. Christianity confidently embraces the position that there is absolute truth. It will never give up this view of reality as believes in the God of Creation that the Bible presents. In every other contrary position, rationality is lacking.
5. Young people who study at Brazilian universities should not allow them to be intimidated by professors and colleagues who claim that biblical truth is absurd. Even without answers to the tricky questions, they should not abandon their faith.

There are rational answers to serious questions. It just needs more knowledge to respond.

The apostle Paul begins verse 18 of the first chapter of Romans with the words, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven." God is angry. His anger manifests itself because we do not think about where the intelligence that created the universe came from. He is angry because we suppress the truth of our hearts. He is furious because we ignore the natural revelation of His power. God is angry because biologists do not stop to thank God for the fantastic body we have, where each cell harbors trillions and trillions of information from your body. God is angry because our knowledge increases, but we are less and less attentive to the Creator. We are inexcusable because the preaching of God is everywhere and we ignore it.

Creation is a herald of the creator. Creation with its multifaceted beauty is an eloquent message from the creator. The universe did not arise spontaneously. It is not the product of a cosmic explosion or an evolution of millions and millions of years. Matter is neither eternal nor divine. God created all things and he is distinct from creation. He is outside of creation and at the same time present in it. The creator is both transcendent and immanent. With the progress of science, we are even more delighted with the greatness of creation and with the majesty of the creator. Stellar worlds, billions of galaxies, with their almost indescribable complexity point to the omnipotence of the creator. Both the macrocosm and the microcosm stamp the creator's fingerprints. Due to this stupendous work of creation, men are inexcusable before the Creator.

May we say together with the psalmist David: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.”²

² Psalm 19:1

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